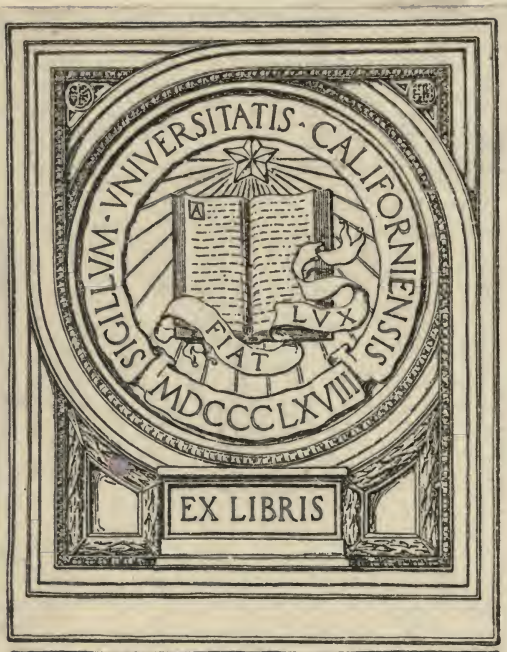
TIGER LAND

C. E. GOULDSBURY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TIGERLAND

A TIGER DANCE.

[*Frontispiece.*

TIGERLAND

REMINISCENCES OF FORTY YEARS' SPORT AND ADVENTURE IN BENGAL

BY

C. E. GOULDSBURY

(LATE) INDIAN POLICE

AUTHOR OF

"DULALL, THE FOREST GUARD," "LIFE IN THE INDIAN POLICE"

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

It was in the year 187– that I first met with the individual whose sporting reminiscences are recorded in this narrative. He had then, though still comparatively young, been already seventeen years in India—after five spent at sea as cabin boy and seaman, having started life as a stowaway when about fifteen years of age.

As I came to know him better, and had learnt something of his life, I recognized that his had been no ordinary existence but one full of strange and interesting experiences, specially in connection with the hunting of big game.

His stories of these adventures interested me greatly, and seemed so strange and out of the way as compared with others that I had read or heard of, that I tried to induce him to write and publish them, but he declined absolutely, having—as he declared—a strong objection to seeing his name in print.

I came across him again often during my long service in India, and each time he had something new to tell me—some fresh hunting story or interesting adventure he had experienced, till I had collected quite a budget of his stories, for I always wrote them down.

I met him again, many years later, in England, shortly after he had retired—by which time he had added considerably to his stock of interesting adventures with big game, and delighted in relating his experiences, though disinclined as ever to publish them.

Finally, seeing it was useless attempting to persuade him, yet confident that his reminiscences would make interesting reading, I suggested writing them for him—using his diary, and the very elaborate notes he had made from time to time. After some discussion, he eventually consented, but only on condition that his name should not

appear, nor the names of any persons or places mentioned, lest these should betray him!

I had no option but to accept these conditions, and with the assistance of his papers, and the records of the stories already in my possession, have compiled this narrative, which is a plain, unvarnished yarn, aspiring to be nothing more than what it is—viz. a record of sport and adventure experienced in the jungles of Bengal during a period of nearly forty years.

Many of the adventures and incidents related having happened whilst in the pursuit of tigers and other dangerous game, it has occurred to me that it might be of advantage to non-Anglo-Indian readers if, before embarking on the volume, they could learn something of the methods employed in hunting these animals, and of the nature of the dangers to which the hunters are exposed.

Such, then, being my object, it must also serve as an excuse for the long—but I trust not altogether uninteresting—dissertation on the subject, given in the introductory chapter, from which it will be evident that when after big game in India, the sportsman takes as large a share of risks as when hunting dangerous game in other portions of the globe.

In the chapter referred to, I have purposely omitted all mention of the weapons generally used, for every sportsman has his own ideas on this subject, and usually some particular make or bore of rifle which he swears by. Personally I have found a D.B. ·577 Express to possess all the stopping power necessary for tigers, and if used with solid steel-tipped bullets, also for buffalo, rhinoceros or bison; while for leopards, bear and all other soft-skinned animals, the smaller bore—·500—I have never known to fail.

Of the latest big-game weapon—the comparatively small-bore cordite rifles—I have had no experience. Doubtless they are more powerful, but their extra weight should be against them for snap-shooting; hence in the dense jungles of Bengal, where snap-shots often have to be taken, a lighter rifle should prove the more useful weapon.

MENTONE,
March, 1913.

AUTHOR.

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UNIV. OF CALIFORNIA

TIGERLAND

INTRODUCTORY CHAPTER

SPORTSMEN who have done most of their shooting on foot—whether it has been lions or elephants in Africa or the grizzly and buffalo in the backwoods of America—are apt to run away with the idea that shooting tigers, or other dangerous game, from a howdah, perched high up on an elephant, is comparatively tame sport, because of the generally supposed security of the position occupied by the hunter! True, when compared with the pursuit of dangerous game on foot, howdah-shooting may, at first sight, appear to be a less hazardous form of sport. Nevertheless, there are few sportsmen, with any lengthened experience of shooting from elephants, who cannot recall instances in which, despite their fancied security, they have been placed in situations of the utmost danger, requiring all the courage and coolness they possess to extricate themselves.

Persons unacquainted with the habits and savage instincts of the animals which frequent the Indian jungles, can form no idea of the ferocity and vindictive disposition of such animals as the tiger, leopard, rhinoceros, buffalo, or bear, nor can they imagine what such brutes are capable of, when wounded and brought to bay. For, any one of these animals, when it finds itself hemmed in, will think nothing of charging an elephant, or even a line of elephants, over and over again and, if not stopped by a well-directed shot, will make its charge good.

This, in the case of a tiger or leopard may, and often does, mean its getting on to an elephant's head or stern and clinging there, with teeth and claws, to the utter

demoralization of this generally stolid beast, often resulting in its headlong flight in any direction it may happen to be facing at the moment and utterly regardless of what there may be in its path.

The position of the sportsman under these circumstances is anything but a pleasant one, for, on the one hand, he stands a fair chance of being swept off the howdah—loaded guns and all—by projecting branches or, should he be fortunate enough to escape this fate, of the elephant going head-over-heels into some "nullah," which sometimes have a drop of from ten to fifteen feet; not to mention the added danger from the unwelcome intruder itself, which could, without much difficulty, clamber into the howdah or seize and pull off the driver, in which cases the chances of the sportsman coming safely out of the mêlée would be a poor one, for the elephant, already mad with terror would, without its driver to soothe and pacify it, soon become absolutely frenzied, and might continue its flight for hours. For anyone to attempt to jump or slide off an elephant's back when in this demoralized condition would be to expose himself to the still greater danger of being either trampled to death by the frantic beast or torn in pieces with its trunk, for these animals even when composed and in their right minds, are peculiarly sensitive to any sudden movement or of anything falling near or touching them.

There is no animal so generally docile and obedient as a domesticated elephant, but when roused by anger or demoralized through fear, there is probably nothing in the brute creation so thoroughly dangerous. Were it not for this defect in their disposition the fact of a tiger or leopard climbing into a howdah would be no very serious matter, since the occupant could easily, at such close range, plant his shot at once into some vital spot. Unfortunately, on such occasions, however, the elephant either tries to shake its assailant off, and if successful attempts to trample it to death—or makes a clean bolt, as already stated. In either case, its movements are so extremely violent that it is as much as the sportsman can do to retain his position in the howdah, much less use his rifle to defend himself.

In fact, it is almost preferable to be on an elephant that

runs away, rather than on one that stops to fight, for in the latter case the occupant of the howdah is pretty sure to be thrown out—sooner or later—perhaps into the tiger's very jaws, or at any rate close enough to make his position an extremely perilous one.

But it is not only in combats with tigers and leopards that the element of danger is present when shooting off elephants, such encounters being equally perilous with the rhinoceros and buffalo—especially the former, for the Indian "rhino," as it is familiarly called, is truly a most formidable animal.

In weight and bulk, almost equal to an elephant, its short, stumpy legs give it a stability not possessed by the latter, and the shortness of its legs in no way interferes with its speed which, when charging, is tremendous; its charge is practically irresistible—cases, indeed, being known of elephants, caught broadside on, being knocked completely over.

The injuries, too, which it can inflict with its sharp-pointed, powerful horn, sometimes a foot in length, and its strong teeth, sharp at the edge as a razor, makes the animal a most dangerous foe. Hence it is little wonder that—with very rare exceptions—the staunchest elephants cannot be induced to face a "rhino," much less stand and await its charge. Under these circumstances, to shoot a charging "rhino" is no easy matter, and the sportsman who has been fortunate enough to bag one, under these conditions, has much to be thankful for.

In the huge, and practically impenetrable jungles of Eastern Bengal and Assam, where these animals are to be found, they can only be hunted on elephants, either by beating in the ordinary way should the jungle be negotiable, or by going after them quietly on a pad elephant, a more certain, though no less dangerous plan, as will be seen hereafter.

If the first-mentioned method be adopted, the animal must be beaten out of its lair to howdahs, posted at convenient places, and it may easily be conceived that a naturally slothful, but short-tempered beast like a "rhino" suddenly aroused, perhaps from its siesta, by an advancing crowd of elephants crashing through the jungle, with their

mahouts yelling and shouting, would not be likely to take their intrusion in very good part.

Still, the natural instinct, common to all savage creatures, will probably prompt it, in the first instance, to seek safety in flight, and it may therefore try to escape, but only to find its retreat cut off by the howdahs posted in its line of flight, while the noisy beating line behind it still continues to advance.

Rendered desperate, therefore, by its perilous position and trusting to its weight and speed to clear the obstruction to its front, it rushes headlong at the nearest howdah with a velocity almost impossible to calculate, making it most difficult for the sportsman to stop it, which he could only hope to do by a bullet through the centre of the forehead or behind the shoulder.

To hit it in any other part of the body would be worse than useless, as the animal—so far only actuated by fear—might still, if unmolested, swerve and pass on, but if wounded in addition, would most assuredly attack the elephant and possibly overturn it, or if it bolted, pursue it with a persistency for which they are notorious, inflicting wounds, perhaps, which may eventually prove fatal. True a " rhino " thus charging has occasionally been dropped by a well-directed bullet, but taking all things into consideration the odds are much against such accurate shooting under the circumstances described.

Should the sportsman, however, select the other plan referred to, he must first obtain the services of a tracker who is thoroughly acquainted with the habits of this animal, and ascertain through him which of the many tunnel-like tracks, made by the " rhino " through the grass on their way to the feeding ground outside, is the most recent one. Having discovered this, he must then be on the ground a couple of hours before daylight, mounted on his staunchest elephant and armed with the largest-bore rifle he possesses, taking care to approach the place unseen and with as little noise as possible.

The elephant must then be carefully concealed within the high grass, just off the track so that the sportsman may command some twenty to thirty yards from the entrance and then wait patiently and, above all, noiselessly

till daybreak, when he may expect the animal's return, for it is a common fact that, unless in any way disturbed or alarmed, a " rhino " will invariably return to its lair within the forest by the path it made on last going out.

Hence, if the sportsman is successful in concealing his elephant completely and keeping it, and himself, quite still, he has every chance of obtaining an easy shot as the animal comes back, which it generally does at a walk or, at worst, a lumbering trot.

Great care, however, must be taken that no shot is fired until the beast is well in front of the position taken up, for this not only ensures a more certain and fatal shot but also considerably lessens the danger of the animal charging, which it most certainly would do should the shot be fired from any position in front of it and not prove immediately fatal.

If, however, in spite of all precautions taken, the animal, after receiving the shot, does not continue in the direction it was going, but stops or turns round, this may be taken as an indication that hostilities are about to commence and the sportsman must then prepare for a desperate encounter, for its marvellously keen sense of scent and hearing will soon enable the now infuriated beast to discover whence the shot was fired, and it will charge immediately in that direction. Meanwhile, the elephant, unlikely to await such an attack, will probably have turned and fled as soon as it had heard or seen its enemy approaching. The situation now will not be difficult to imagine : on the one hand, a large and powerful animal, maddened with pain and rage, thirsting to revenge itself upon its foe, while, on the other, the elephant, equally mad with fear, flying helter-skelter through the jungle, its riders liable at any moment to be brushed off the pad and hurled into the path of the pursuing beast or precipitated, together with their mount, into some yawning chasm, such as a dry river-bed or quicksand, of which there are many in such jungles.

Such then are some of the perils to which the Indian sportsman hunting dangerous game on elephants is liable, and to which must be added perils issuing from causes quite unconnected with the animal he is hunting, as for

instance, any of the tusker elephants amongst the line of howdahs going suddenly mad or " must "—as this condition in a male elephant is called—which occasionally happens during a shoot.

Again, there is always the possible danger of an encounter with wild elephants or, worse still, a solitary bull or " rogue elephant," than which there is no more dangerous animal in nature's great menagerie—the forests of Bengal.

Driven out of a band by the other bulls for misconduct, it roams about alone, brooding over its expulsion and, if encountered in the jungle, will attack any male elephant there may be in the line or amongst the " howdahs," and being generally a powerful beast with tusks can do considerable damage before it is driven off or shot.

On the whole, therefore, the pursuit of big game in India would, as a matter of fact, be far safer on foot. Unfortunately the Indian jungles do not as a rule lend themselves to this form of sport, being generally too dense and high. It is true the " guns " are sometimes placed on trees or platforms, called " maichans," but the immobility of such a position is a serious drawback, as a wounded animal cannot then be followed up at once and thus is occasionally lost.

Hence, such a position, though practically quite safe, does not commend itself to true sportsmen, the majority of whom would prefer to encounter any of the possible risks described than run any chance of losing an animal they have wounded.

CHAPTER I

LONG before the usual period at which boys begin to think about the career they shall adopt, I had made up my mind to go to sea and, when about fifteen, resolved to lose no time in carrying out my wishes.

Liverpool being the nearest seaport to my home, I decided to try there, but failing to find a ship with a captain willing to engage me, I watched my opportunity, and on one dark and rainy night, stole on board a vessel, bound for Newfoundland, and concealed myself in the hold.

Having thus embarked on my adventures as a stowaway, I was careful to maintain this position till the ship was well out to sea when hunger and thirst, combined with an insufficiency of ventilation, compelled me to make my presence known.

I had some difficulty in finding my way on to the deck, but, finally, as I stepped on to it from the hatchway I was promptly seized by one of the crew and haled before the captain who received me with a welcome not exactly calculated to impress me favourably with the seafaring profession.

Enraged at my sudden, and wholly unauthorized, appearance on board his vessel, he gave expression to his feelings with the assistance of a rope's end—an operation repeated later by the mate and, at intervals during the day, by various members of the crew.

Bruised and sore, in mind as well as body, I was finally handed over to the cook with orders to be at once initiated in the duties of a cabin boy. The captain observing angrily " that he had no use for idlers in his ship, and since I had boarded her without leave, I must work my passage out."

Fortunately for me, the cook, a huge, good-natured looking negro, had his own ideas as to my future education,

and being now responsible for my efficiency was allowed to indulge them, and under his tuition I soon acquired a knowledge of my duties.

Unhappily, these duties brought me into daily contact with my principal tormentors, the captain and the mate, but by dint of close attention to my work, I escaped with an average of one thrashing a week which, as my sable friend observed, was " extronorary good."

Nevertheless my life during that voyage was one of daily toil and trouble, very different to the picture my fancy had created of " a life on the ocean wave," and on our arrival at St. John's, I took an early opportunity of quitting that ship for one bound for Pensacola. Obtaining leave to go on shore, I shipped on board this vessel, and before my leave expired was well on my way to that distant port.

The next four years I passed in voyages between the various ports of North and South America, sometimes in English ships but as often under the Stars and Stripes, till one day, in New York, finding an English vessel bound for the East Indies, I shipped on board of her, now as an able-bodied seaman or, in other words, A.B.

We arrived in due course at Calcutta, that paradise of sailors where, as I once heard an old salt say, " one could get drunk for eight annas any day in the week," a sum equivalent to about sixpence in these days.

However, this rare and apparently much valued privilege having no particular attraction for me, I found Calcutta far inferior to many other towns I had seen. Its damp, warm climate, evil-smelling streets, cockroaches, big almost as mice, and other members of the insect tribe, rendering it to my mind a most undesirable place of residence.

On the other hand, the river in which we lay—the far-famed Hughli—with its crowd of shipping of every rig and nation, interested me greatly, and I would sit for hours, comfortably ensconced in the fore-top, watching some huge vessel being towed up or down its swirling waters, recalling to my mind the dreaded under-tow of which I had heard much during the voyage. Little did I think then how soon I should be grappling with this monster, in a desperate

struggle for existence down in the depths of that mighty river.

The incident happened in this wise. We had been lying some three weeks in the river, with the fierce May sun beating down upon the ship, when one morning the mate discovered that all her paint work was being blistered and set the hands to work to give her a good wash down. A platform had been rigged over her side and I was standing on it drawing up water when suddenly I felt it give beneath me, and before I had time to seize a rope I was shot into the river, but falling feet downward with the body quite erect, fortunately did not hurt myself.

Striking the water in this fashion I went down a considerable depth. However, being a strong swimmer and well used to diving, the fact that I was overboard did not disturb me in the least, and as soon as I ceased falling struck out upwards towards the light showing dimly on the surface.

I had made a few strokes in this direction when my progress was suddenly arrested, and though I still continued moving, I soon found it was in a direction parallel to the surface, which was yet several feet above me, while I seemed to be sinking lower every moment.

I tried in vain to retain an upright posture ; for each time I attempted it my legs were swept from under me—almost at right angles to the body—and my neck thrust forward till my chin rested on my chest, and presently I felt myself being rolled over and over entirely at the mercy of the waters and with no power to strike out with either arms or legs.

I now knew that I was drowning for I felt I could not hold my breath much longer, nor resist the mysterious power which, while forcing me along, was taking me deeper down as I could tell from the increasing darkness all around me as the volumes of water increased in intensity overhead.

I was rapidly losing consciousness and in another moment must have given up the struggle, when my sidelong and downward progress was arrested as suddenly as it had commenced. I was conscious of a shock, causing me to assume a vertical position, and the next instant I was shot violently upwards, and found myself on the surface

exhausted and almost insensible, but instinctively rather than of my own volition managed to keep myself afloat. However, I soon recovered sufficiently to realize the situation, and found I had come up close to a ferry boat which was crossing at the moment, and the man in charge, having already seen me, brought his boat up quickly and, assisted by some of his passengers, hauled me on board.

I pointed out my ship, from which I found I had drifted about eight hundred yards, barely a short half mile and yet it had seemed to me a score of miles. Pulling now against the stream, the journey back occupied the best part of two hours.

At last we reached the ship and I have some recollection of being assisted up her side, but from that moment to the day I found myself lying in a hospital on shore, my mind was, as it is up to this day, absolutely blank.

It appeared that I had lost consciousness immediately after reaching the vessel, and my condition becoming serious was sent off that evening to the hospital, where I had been for the last ten days, suffering from brain fever and more or less delirious all the time.

However, I was now convalescent, and later in the day had a visit from the Harbour Master who, having heard of my adventure, was anxious to learn the details for, as he remarked, during his thirty years' experience of the Hughli, he had never known of any one falling into it who had lived to tell the tale!

I told him exactly what had happened from the moment of falling overboard till I was brought back to the ship—for strangely enough up to this time the whole incident was as vivid in my mind as if it had occurred a few minutes before, despite the lapse of time and memory intervening.

He listened with much interest, and when I had concluded, congratulated me warmly on what he considered a miraculous escape, "for," he continued, "it is evident from your description that you were caught in the undertow, and had you been less used to remaining under water, must inevitably have drowned."

He then explained to me the nature of this dread demon of the Hughli which, to describe it briefly, apparently consists of a collection of currents running several feet

below the surface of the stream, with a force against which it is useless for the strongest swimmer to contend.

" Some of these currents," he went on, " are believed to run counter to each other and to meet at certain points, the two opposing forces causing an upward action of the waters in the form of a column or of a water-spout reversed."

The sudden propulsion to the surface, to which I owed my life was, he said, probably due to the fact that, while being carried along, I had, most providentially, encountered one of these opposing currents and had been shot upwards on the upheaval that immediately ensued.

I was feeling too weak and ill just then to realize how near I had been to death, but later on, as I lay there daily recovering health and strength, the terrible experience would come back to me, sending a cold shiver through my frame at the mere recollection of that desperate struggle.

And, here let me assure the reader, from knowledge born of this experience, that drowning cannot be the painless ending some theorists would have us believe. The visions of green fields and beauteous flowers they speak of as the prelude to unconsciousness and death, might perhaps have come later; but no vision, however pleasingly absorbing could possibly have dispelled the feeling of deadly terror that possessed me nor mitigated by one fraction the physical suffering I endured while engulfed in the depths of those rushing waters.

By the time I had recovered, and was discharged from hospital, the great Indian Mutiny had commenced, and harassing accounts reached the city daily of Europeans being massacred wholesale, of women murdered before their husbands' eyes, children tossed aloft on bayonet points, and other atrocities too terrible to describe, till every white man in the country felt bound to take up arms.

Depôts had been established at all important centres where corps of yeomanry and police were rapidly being raised, and sailors, ever ready for adventure, were deserting their ships in hundreds eager to enlist and help to avenge these cruel massacres.

My own ship had long since sailed on her homeward voyage, and having no friends or other ties to keep me in Calcutta I was, naturally, as eager as the rest to join this

new-made army, and presenting myself at the head-quarters of the Bengal Mounted Constabulary was enlisted as a trooper.

We left a few days later for the front, by rail as far as the line was laid and thence on foot by road, for although a " mounted corps," of horses as yet we had none ! These were to be purchased on our arrival at the base camp.

Our saddlery-equipment and camp equipage accompanied us on bullock-carts, hence our progress was necessarily slow, two and a half miles an hour being the limit of a native bullock's pace. However, by a judicious manipulation of their tails, we increased their pace to three, finally reaching our camp well within our time.

Here a crowd of horses of every shape and size were presently paraded for selection, amongst them an animal so remarkable in appearance as to merit a description in a paragraph to itself.

The beast was a snow-white stallion of exceptionally good make, with grey-blue eyes and nose and ears of a delicate pale pink ! Thus far, however, the animal was as Nature had created it, but its owner, evidently dissatisfied with her work and being apparently of an artistic turn of mind, had added to its " beauty " by dyeing the mane and tail sky-blue !

This extraordinary-looking object, led by two attendants, was brought up to our " C.O.," the owner remarking as he pointed proudly to it that " an animal so magnificent in appearance was eminently suited to carry one of his exalted rank ! "

However, the latter, an ex-cavalry officer, having his own ideas on the subject, was not to be persuaded, and the beast moreover presently showing an inclination to savage one of its attendants, was speedily rejected altogether as unfit for the troop, much to the disgust of its master, who had probably looked forward to making a good bargain.

The selection then proceeded, and the hundred odd animals required being eventually purchased, were made over to each trooper, according to his number on the Roster as being the simplest way of dealing with the matter.

But, as was soon discovered, this haphazard method of

distribution had led to some extraordinary, not to say comical combinations. For example, a burly individual, weighing over fifteen stone would find himself in possession of an animal barely up to ten, while, on the other hand, some slim, featherweight youth would perhaps be mated with a charger of elephantine proportions.

However, these little errors were rectified next day, when, permission being accorded for the men to exchange with each other, we were soon most suitably equipped. But soon there rose a difficulty which had been clearly overlooked by those responsible for our creation as a mounted corps.

To enlist a man and provide him with a horse, was easy enough, but for the combination to be of any practical use as a fighting machine it was obviously necessary that the man should be able to ride the horse !

Now, as it happened, most of the men were sailors by profession, " Handy men " no doubt ready to go anywhere and do anything but as to any knowledge of horsemanship, even in its most elementary form, as innocent as the babe unborn !

However, since as a mounted corps we had been raised, and mounted troops were most urgently required, we must either qualify ourselves as such or suffer the degradation of being disbanded as useless. The last was not to be thought of for an instant, for apart from the ignominy of it, the rumours of the cruel and increasing massacres that reached us daily had worked on our feelings to a degree difficult to describe and had created a desire for vengeance not easy to forego.

Under these circumstances, we all felt that there was but one thing to be done—the men who could not ride must learn to do so ! A deputation conveying a proposal to this effect was accordingly sent to the Commanding Officer, and his approval being readily accorded, a riding school was immediately started, some half a dozen men who could ride acting as instructors.

As for myself, being accustomed to riding from my earliest childhood, I was deputed with two or three others equally proficient, to break in some of the most untractable of our late purchases.

While so employed we had leisure in the intervals between our different mounts to watch those now undergoing instruction and a more comical sight I have seldom witnessed.

The plain in front of the tents was alive with men and horses, each striving to gain the mastery over the other, but never did men, so seriously engaged, present a more grotesque and ridiculous appearance.

Here, a burly form in trooper's guise, but with " A.B." stamped on every curve and line of it, might be seen clinging to his stirrup iron with one foot poised, yet half afraid to trust himself entirely off the ground as he hopped solemnly after the horse which circled round him.

There, another equally obvious son of Neptune despite his military attire, who having with much difficulty gained the saddle from the off side, sat lost in solemn wonder at finding himself facing the wrong end of his steed !

While away in the distance were horses careering madly across the plain, some riderless, others with their riders' arms twined lovingly round their necks.

But, quainter still were some of the expressions we overheard uttered by those who, somewhat more advanced than their companions and proud of their superior skill, were galloping around the camp at a pace extremely dangerous not only to themselves but also to those going in an opposite direction.

" Starboard there, Bill, hard a starboard or you will run me down," cries one of the latter, as " Bill," pulling the wrong rein, runs into him.

" Put your helm down," retorts Bill, " and I'll go past your quarter," with the result that " Bill " and his friend, in their mutual efforts to execute this nautical manœuvre, became mixed up with the tent ropes and horses and riders were soon sprawling on the ground.

In the meanwhile, another unmistakable mariner who, owing to his self-asserted powers as a horseman, had been assigned a horse less tractable than the others, was displaying his skill before an admiring crowd. Perched on a huge, raw-boned, wicked-looking bay, he strove in vain, by gentle means, to make the jibbing brute advance.

His comrades, though thoroughly enjoying his discomfiture, were yet ready with advice.

"Twist his tail, Jack," said one, recollecting the wonderful results of this method as applied to the bullocks on the recent march.

"Hit him behind," suggests another, secretly longing to witness the disaster such a proceeding was likely to bring about.

But the wily "Jack" knew better than to attempt any such perilous experiments. Well aware that his reputed "skill," based on a previous donkey ride or two, was unlikely to stand the strain of any acrobatic feat that his steed might indulge in if annoyed, he was determined that gentle means alone should be employed.

Unfortunately for him, however, the horse, weary of standing still, now took the matter into his own hands, and plunging suddenly forward commenced to kick, sending the hapless rider flying through the air into the midst of his comrades, now convulsed with laughter!

But to describe all the comical sights I witnessed in that wondrous riding school would fill more pages than my readers would probably care to read. Suffice it then to say that, at the end of ten days' instruction, every member of the troop had acquired, if not the art of riding, at any rate of sitting on a horse without falling off, and so we resumed our march.

Shortly after this we had several skirmishes with the enemy, both while on the march, and when we were encamped at nights. Some of these encounters ended in sharp fighting, but as we invariably drove the rebels off, the troop had many oppportunities of testing their newly-acquired horsemanship and acquitted themselves well when galloping in pursuit.

Unfortunately for me, however, a serious accident which occurred a day or two previous to the first engagement, not only prevented my sharing in these events but nearly brought my soldiering to an untimely end.

As the incidents which led to my disaster were of a somewhat exciting nature, I venture to narrate them.

The horse allotted to me proved to be one of the most vicious of the lot, and though by careful handling I had,

to some extent, gained its confidence, it was still apt, at times, to show temper to its " syce."

One morning this man, much excited and evidently in deadly fear, reported that the horse had suddenly gone mad and begged that I would come at once.

I followed him to where the horses were all picketed and had little difficulty in finding it among the crowd. For there, apart from all the rest, with ears laid back and eyes flashing fire, it stood, a picture of savage fury.

As the syce approached, it ground its teeth, then, screaming with rage, made for him open mouthed. I put out my hand to try and stop the brute, but seizing my outstretched thumb between his teeth, it snapped them like a vice, and finding I could not pull my hand away, I threw my right arm round its neck and there I clung with both feet off the ground.

A terrible struggle now began. Swinging its head from side to side the horse shook me as a terrier would a rat, but, accustomed as I was to clinging on to yards and ropes, its efforts to shake me off were useless.

At last, tired with its exertions, it stood still for a while, then plunging madly forward was brought up by the picket rope and fell over on to its side.

Falling with the horse I lay between its legs, expecting every moment to have my brains dashed out in its violent struggles to regain its feet.

At length it got on to its knees but before it had time to rise, I placed my foot against its side and pushed with all my strength. The horse fell back again. I was conscious of a sudden fearful wrench and then felt that my left hand was free.

Rolling quickly away from between the horse's legs, I scrambled to my feet and dazed and bewildered with all I had undergone, I stood for some moments trying to collect my thoughts and recall to mind the events of the past half hour.

The horse meanwhile had also risen to its feet and was now standing quietly by. But glancing at its head I noticed it held something in its mouth.

Wondering what this could be, I looked again when, suddenly a wave of recollection came surging through my

brain, and I remembered that the horse had seized my thumb between its teeth. Instinctively I felt that something terrible had occurred; a cold shiver ran through my frame and longing to know the worst yet half afraid to be enlightened, I looked down at my hand.

To my horror and dismay I could see but the four fingers only. The thumb was gone! Torn completely away at its juncture with the hand, there was nothing left of it but some jagged skin and sinews. Yet, strange to say, I felt no pain—this was yet to come! But the horror and shock of the discovery, added to the exertions I had undergone, now began to tell upon me. A dizziness came over me, my limbs trembled; soon all around me seemed suddenly to grow dark, and drifting rapidly into unconsciousness I fell heavily to the ground.

When consciousness returned, I found I was in my tent with the surgeon bandaging my hand. He told me he had "trimmed" and sewn up the wound, adding that my thumb had since been found lying near the horse's feet and was to be buried that evening with one of our men who had died of sunstroke.

For two long weary months I lay 'twixt life and death, for it was the height of the hot season, and exposed as I was to the full force of it, with no better shelter than a thin canvas tent afforded, I marvel how I survived to tell the tale.

At length I was allowed to leave the pile of straw which had served me as a bed, and being pronounced fit for further duty was, on the first opportunity offering, sent on to rejoin my corps which, fighting its way forward, was now many miles distant.

CHAPTER II

For some eighteen months or longer the corps to which I belonged took its full share in the various skirmishes and petty actions which occurred within that period, and until the great rebellion was eventually stamped out. But the North-West portion of India, where the Mutiny had been most violent, remained for some time longer in a more or less disturbed condition.

It was during these troubled times that I, now a sergeant, was deputed to accompany a party, consisting of an officer and twenty-five invalid and time-expired men, proceeding to a large cantonment many miles distant, whence the latter were to be conveyed by rail to the port of embarkation.

The party was commanded by a senior officer, accompanied by his wife, and, with a surgeon in medical charge, servants, and camp-followers, made up a total of some fifty persons, of whom thirty were Europeans.

As there were no railways in that part of India in those days, the journey had to be performed by road, in marches of from fifteen to twenty miles, the party halting daily at some village on the way. But although our route lay through this dangerous country, yet, with the exception of the officers and myself, none of the party carried firearms!

This may appear incredible, but is nevertheless a fact; for some one, in his wisdom, had decreed that for Thomas Atkins to go armed under such circumstances would be highly dangerous to the community at large, whereas the real danger was all the other way. However, the orders had to be obeyed, and the men, before starting, were all accordingly disarmed, even to their side-arms, and thus, minus any firearms save three fowling-pieces and a revolver, we started on our journey.

For the first three marches all went well enough, and though bands of suspicious-looking natives were frequently encountered, none of them attempted to molest us; and, but for their scowling faces and an occasional muttered imprecation touching our colour and nationality, we had had no cause for apprehension.

Our marches, too, were quite enjoyable on the whole. Starting daily some hours before daybreak, we usually reached our halting-place before the sun was high, to find our tents pitched within some sheltered grove where, after a tub and breakfast, we enjoyed some hours of rest. The heat during the day was too great to allow us to venture out, but as the sun declined the doctor and myself, generally, took our guns and wandered round the camp on the chance of finding something for the pot; and it was on one of these foraging expeditions that I met with my adventure.

It was on our fourth day's march that, as we neared our halting-place, I noticed on a lake near the village some small objects which looked to me like duck. I pointed them out to the doctor, and he being of the same opinion we decided to go after them that evening. Accordingly, about four o'clock, each engaging a couple of coolies from the village, we walked back to the lake, and, taking opposite sides of it, cautiously approached our quarry. Being closer to the water's edge, I was the first to reach it, and, selecting the nearest bird, I fired and wounded it.

One of my coolies, seeing the bird was hit, rushed into the water, and, as it seemed quite shallow, I let him go on till I discovered from the other birds not rising, that it was a coot I had shot. I called to him to come back, but, paying no attention, he continued to wade on. Thinking he probably wanted the bird himself, I turned away, meaning to join the doctor, and had gone some little distance when the other coolie began shouting excitedly. I could not understand what he was saying, but, turning round, saw that the man in the water was now evidently beyond his depth. Again I called to him to come back, accompanying my words with signs, and saw him turn as if about to do so, when suddenly his head went under water, and, re-appearing for an instant, down it went again.

I did not at the moment realize what was happening, but learnt later that the lake was full of weeds, which the man by turning too suddenly had twisted round his legs, binding them together. However, I soon made out that something was amiss, so running quickly back, I sat down and tried to pull off my boots, intending to swim out to him. Unfortunately, they were high Wellingtons, and, already wet through, baffled all my efforts to remove them.

Meanwhile, the unfortunate man, after struggling once more to the surface, finally disappeared. I now told the other coolie as well as I was able, to run quickly to the village for assistance, and that I would go round the lake and fetch the other sahib. The man went off at once, and, as we afterwards discovered, told the villagers that I had drowned his comrade! However, he had apparently understood my message, for when we returned half an hour later we found the body had been recovered. I asked the doctor whether he thought it would be possible to revive it, but, on hearing it had been under about forty minutes, he said it would be useless to attempt to do so, and as the villagers were now crowding round us with threatening looks and gestures, we thought it advisable to get back to the camp.

But, as we turned to go, one of the crowd—a big, burly individual—caught me by the sleeve, and in words and signs gave me to understand that while the other sahib might go, I was to be taken to the lake and thrown into it in the same place where the coolie had been drowned! I freed myself from his grasp, and, instinctively throwing up my gun, pointed it at his head, when the doctor caught hold of my arm, nearly sending off the piece, and called out—

"Don't fire, or we shall both be murdered."

"I am not going to fire, and only meant to frighten him," I replied; then asked him in a whisper whether his gun was loaded.

"No," he answered. "I fired off both barrels at a snipe just before I met you."

"Never mind," I continued, "they do not know this, and probably think both our guns are loaded, so unless they take to stoning us we may get back all safe."

Then, holding our guns before us in readiness to fire, and occasionally pointing them at the crowd, we retreated slowly towards the camp. The plan succeeded better than I had expected, and for some time we kept the crowd in check, till, seeing we were likely to escape, they resorted to the very measures I had feared, and soon a shower of stones and earth-clods came whizzing past our heads. Fortunately none hit us, and as our assailants were afraid to come too close, we soon passed out of range.

On arriving at the camp we informed the Commandant of what had taken place, and had scarcely concluded our report when the whole village, armed with javelins, iron-bound "lathis," and other formidable weapons, came swarming round the tents. Yelling and shouting like maniacs let loose, and using the most abusive language they could think of, they danced round us in their fury, and, brandishing their weapons in our faces, demanded my immediate and unconditional surrender.

"Give up that sahib!" they cried, pointing to where I stood. "Give up the man who drowned our brother, or we will set the camp on fire and kill every white man in it!"

There was no mistaking the meaning of these cries, for there were some amongst us who understood the language; and that they were capable of carrying out their threat was unhappily too evident, since they numbered probably three hundred, all armed, as I have said, with various deadly weapons, which they doubtless knew well how to use, whereas we were but thirty Europeans in all, most of these practically ineffective from fever and debility, and one a helpless woman, while as to arms, two muzzle-loading shot-guns, a revolver, and three regulation jim-crack tailors' swords were the only weapons we possessed.

True, there were our servants and camp-followers—some twenty, perhaps, in all—but they, too, were natives of the country, and more or less in sympathy with the crowd, and, judging from their attitude, seemed half-disposed to join it, though, through fear of the consequences, they might at best remain neutral.

To me, as the individual principally concerned, the position was a terrible one. Yet, desperate as it was, that

of the officer commanding was, perhaps, the more painful, since to him was left the responsibility of deciding whether I was to be given up or not. Indeed, it would be difficult to imagine a more painful situation for a commanding officer to be placed in ! For he knew that to comply with the demand made by the villagers would be practically dooming me to death, seeing they had made no secret as to my disposal. On the other hand, he was powerless to protect me, as any attempt to do so would undoubtedly have involved the instant massacre of the detachment to a man—a clearly useless sacrifice of life, since I too must necessarily be murdered with the rest. Nor could I, under such circumstances, as a man, much less as a soldier, ask for or even expect his protection. And yet it was difficult for me to yield myself up willingly, knowing full well the terrible fate in store for me.

Accordingly when, a moment or two later, he questioned me as to what was to be done, I replied that it was impossible for me to give any opinion, and must therefore leave the matter to himself and my brother soldiers to decide as they thought best. He then went off to consult them. At this consultation, so far as I could gather from a word or two I heard, opinion seemed divided, the doctor in particular seeming to be at variance with the others. However, the infuriated mob allowing them little time for argument, a decision was soon made.

Meanwhile I had nerved myself for the result, and decided what to do should they, as I thought probable, decide to give me up. Hence, when the Commandant informed me that such was the decision necessity had compelled them to arrive at, I was to some extent prepared.

" Very well, sir," I replied ; " but I intend to make a fight for it before giving myself up, and if you will keep the crowd engaged for a minute or two longer, I think I shall be able to defend myself, at any rate for a time." My intention being to place myself with my back against a neghbouring tree, there with the firearms keep the crowd at bay, and if they rushed me to shoot down as many as I could, and thus so inflame the fury of the rest that they would finish me off at once ! For since I knew I had to die, to do so fighting seemed infinitely preferable to being

murdered in cold blood, thrown into the lake, perhaps, as they had hinted, probably with my hands and feet both tied, to drown like a dog! It was an end too horrible to contemplate. Small wonder, then, I had chosen a more dignified and less uncomfortable mode of dying.

But to continue. As the Commandant turned away, presumably to comply with my request, the doctor, saying he for one would stand by me, came over to my side, and I told him the plan that I had formed. Then, loading the two guns and the revolver, I called out that I was ready. Meanwhile, we had already selected a tree, and, running across to it, took up our position before the mob could stop us. But they followed quickly, and, mad with rage at being thus outwitted, would have set on us at once, but happily, the sight of our two gun-barrels pointing directly at their heads, coupled with our threats to shoot the first man who advanced, checked them for the moment. The tree, too, was fortunately a very large one, perhaps three feet in diameter; hence, by standing back to back, a foot or two apart, the trunk served as a barrier on one side, while each of us commanded not only his front but his right and left as well. They could not, therefore, rush us without losing some of their number, which they were not disposed to do.

How long we might have succeeded in keeping them in check it is impossible to say, but three hundred to two were fearfully heavy odds, even had we been properly entrenched and armed with modern weapons. It was improbable that we could have held out for any length of time, and must eventually have been overpowered and murdered. Providence, however, had ordained otherwise; for a few minutes later, as the men, having evidently decided on risking an attack, were just about to rush us, a horseman was seen riding down the road. He proved to be an inspector of police on his ordinary round, who, seeing the crowd assembled, had ridden up to make inquiries.

His arrival created a diversion for a time, and, after being informed of what had taken place, he attempted to reason with the mob. But they were now beyond the influence of argument or persuasion. Mad with the lust of hatred and unsatisfied revenge, they were deaf to his

remonstrances, and finally told him plainly that if he interfered they would treat him as they intended treating us. The inspector, being unarmed and unattended by any of his men, was thus as helpless as ourselves. Nevertheless, it was entirely owing to his tact and intimate knowledge of these people and their ways that we were eventually delivered from the peril we were in. Taking the Commandant aside, he said—

"You see how matters stand; but if you will follow my advice I think you may save the sahibs' lives, for I know the character of these people, and it is the presence of the dead body which makes them so vindictive. Once it is burnt and buried out of sight they will very soon calm down. Tell them then, in an authoritative voice, to go now and dispose of the body, and that when they return you will arrange matters."

Although this suggestion did not at the time commend itself to the Commandant as one likely of success, yet, like the drowning man who sees even in a floating straw something to support him, he eagerly adopted it, and in loud, commanding tones, addressed his noisy audience, for some time without avail. But soon their interest seemed awakened, and before he had concluded they were listening with attention, and as he ceased, broke out in loud applause. "True! true! The sahib says well!" they shouted, with one accord; and presently, to our inexpressible relief, moved off towards the village, whence they issued shortly, carrying faggots, torches, and earthenware pots, and went in the direction of the lake, evidently to perform the funeral rites.

The next hour or two were the longest I ever passed, as we stood there in the dark expecting every moment to hear the men returning and yet unable to do anything to better our position. None of us believed the men would not return, and to me the ordeal of thus waiting for the end was necessarily most painful, but I was still determined to sell my life as dearly as possible, and to make a fight for it whether assisted or alone. However, about eight o'clock the inspector, who had followed the villagers to the lake, returned alone, and informed us that he had spoken to some of the leading men and

told them he would see the dead man's widow received some compensation, and that therefore if they killed me they would not only deprive the woman of her money, but bring trouble on themselves. He added that as the body was now disposed of he was sure we should hear no more about it! Nevertheless, we passed a terribly anxious night, keeping a sharp look out, and long before the dawn, had left the ill-fated village many a mile behind us.

On reaching our destinaton I remitted a sum of one hundred rupees—about £10—to the chief civil authority of the district, and this was eventually handed over to the widow of the coolie. Thus ended the worst experience in my long, eventful life, and often as I look back on it and recall the dreadful drama, I shudder as I think what the last scene might have been, but for the inspector's happy inspiration to make use of the dead body.

CHAPTER III

How long I continued in the troop after the fighting was virtually all over, I cannot now remember, for when writing from memory of a past so rich in incidents, it is not easy to recall the sequence of events, but to the best of my recollection, the corps I belonged to was disbanded towards the close of the year 1860, to come into existence again almost as a whole—though under a new title—in 1861.

By this time the Mutiny had been finally stamped out, and amongst the changes effected by the Government was the creation of a new, semi-military police or constabulary—as it was called—for the whole of India, manned and officered almost entirely by members of the various yeomanry and other irregular forces which had been raised, temporarily, to aid in quelling the rebellion. I was, amongst some others, fortunate enough to be appointed as a junior officer to this new police force, and found myself posted to the district of R——, in the lower provinces of Bengal, as an assistant superintendent, and lost no time in joining my appointment.

The force, as I have said, was organized on semi-military lines, and, in the district I was appointed to, consisted of about five hundred in all, including native officers such as inspectors, sub-inspectors, and head-constables—the whole under the command of an officer styled the District Superintendent, who—as in most cases—was a military man, and to whom I was in the position of second in command.

My life now, though naturally less exciting than what I had been accustomed to lately, was infinitely more interesting, to say nothing of the comfort of living in a house again, being properly attended on by servants, and having proper food, instead of living nowhere in particular,

waiting on myself and foraging, often unsuccessfully, for a meal. My C.O. or superintendent, a recently promoted major, was one of the nicest men I have met, and, being an Irishman like myself, we got on excellently together.

Our duties were fairly heavy, as was only natural considering the condition of the country and the fact that both native officers and men, being quite new to their work, had to be continually instructed in the rules and regulations which we had first to learn ourselves and, in my case, had to pass in, for before being confirmed in their appointments, all assistant superintendents were required to pass an examination in law and the language of their district, within two years of being appointed.

Indeed, so overburdened was I with work that after the first month or two I often found myself regretting my past life despite all its discomforts, for shooting sepoys in the open seemed a preferable occupation—even when being shot at in return—to confinement in a stuffy office all the day, or in my room at nights with an oleaginous "Munshi," endeavouring to instil into my mind some knowledge of his abominable vernacular.

But, later on, when his efforts had to some extent succeeded, and I had gained more experience in my duties, my good-natured superior, seeing my dislike to a sedentary life, sent me often out into the district, ostensibly on investigation or inspection duty, which I performed to the best of my ability, though not, I fear, with any extraordinary results.

These inquisitorial excursions were made once or twice a quarter, each occupying about a week, during which period I was continually on the move, sleeping in village huts, or at a police station, and at times even under a tree with my saddle for a pillow—two such occasions being, I remember, a Christmas and New Year's Eve of the same year.

It was in these wanderings round the country that I first acquired a taste for big game shooting that eventually developed into a passion, for tigers and leopards were plentiful in those days, and, being destructive in proportion, "khubbur," or information of cattle—and sometimes human beings—killed by them was constantly brought

to me by the villagers and police, the reporting of such matters being a portion of their duties.

Often, too, while seated of a morning under a tree—examining witnesses in some case, or poring over musty registers at a station—the distracted owner of a cow or buffalo, killed during the night and dragged into an adjoining jungle, would come running in himself, and, grovelling at my feet, insist on "The preserver of the poor transferring his august presence" to the scene of the disaster and slaying the "bagh"* at once!

I seldom declined these invitations, for the destruction of dangerous game was, I had been told, a part of my business, and one I felt better qualified to tackle than witnesses and registers, since the first I could barely understand, and of the purport of the latter I had but the vaguest notion.

But, diligently as I followed up each information I received, I was invariably unsuccessful, sometimes because the so-called "kill" would on inquiry be found to have died a natural death, though more often, as I know now, the failure was due to my ignorance of the habits of the beasts I was attempting to locate, and it was not till many months later—when I was acting for my C.O., who had gone on three months' leave—that my perseverance was rewarded.

The incident happened in this wise.

One morning, shortly after I had taken charge, I was hearing the usual daily reports from all the police stations. Amongst them was one from the officer in charge of a frontier post urgently requesting to be supplied with some more rounds of ball cartridge. This being a somewhat unusual demand, and one I considered dangerous to comply with without further inquiry, I despatched a mounted constable at once to the post, some seventy miles distant, to demand further details.

In the course of four or five days I received a reply stating that a tiger had for some weeks past taken up his position in a jungle close to the outpost, and not only carried off several head of cattle belonging to the villagers, but had become also so bold and reckless that it was feared he

* Tiger or leopard, according to the height of the informer's imagination.

might take to attacking human beings—hence the request for more ball cartridges.

On receiving this news, I sent orders immediately to the sporting official to collect as many elephants as he could lay his hands on, and have them assembled at his outpost within four days, adding that as I would be there myself as soon as possible he was on no account to take any action calculated to frighten the tiger away before my arrival. My gun and cartridges, together with the food and clothing necessary for a couple of days, I despatched in charge of my factotum on an " ekka "—a light, two-wheeled conveyance of the country. I also sent three ponies for myself to different stages.

Giving time for my impedimenta to arrive, I started myself, overjoyed at the prospect of seeing a tiger at last, and perhaps shooting it ! On my arrival at the outpost I found a large and excited crowd assembled, and learnt that a night or two since the tiger had actually come into the centre of the village, and, jumping a bamboo fence, had carried off a fair-sized cow from the enclosure, returning as he came.

This news was highly satisfactory from my point of view, showing as it did, firstly, that what I had come in quest of was a tiger and not a lepoard, as I had feared, and secondly, that there was every probability of his being found lying up with his kill.

I saw that my instructions as to elephants had been carried out, as six were drawn up awaiting my inspection, and a motley crew they were ! In shape, size, or build, no one animal resembled another, though all had the half-starved and draggled appearance suggestive of improper food and utter neglect. The tallest, which carried an apology for a howdah, was perhaps eight feet, the rest anything from seven to four, their drivers being as strange and weird of appearance as the animals they bestrode.

The howdah, too, was well in keeping with the rest of the entourage, for never was such a marvellous structure seen before, except, perhaps, in some museum of antiquities. Two hundred years since it had possibly graced the triumphal procession of some royal potentate, but its splendour had now departed from it, and the relics merely served to

accentuate the contrast with its past. There was little of the original left, what there was being held together with recent bindings of red tape—a fit emblem of its prospective occupant! However, a howdah, even though an antiquated one, is not to be despised when one is in pursuit of such dangerous game as tigers, especially so active an animal as this one had proved itself to be. So, thankful for small mercies, I clambered into it as gingerly as I could.

The cover was about half a mile distant, and we were just about starting for it when, much to my surprise, the inspector of the division, an enormously fat and most unsportsmanlike individual, came puffing and panting up, mounted on a diminutive pony, and having made his obeisance, requested permission to accompany me on the plea that he had never seen a tiger, and was most anxious to do so.

Permission was readily accorded, though I confess I was at a loss to imagine how my valiant but extremely obese subordinate proposed elevating his huge, unwieldy person on to the back of an elephant. However, he had evidently grasped the situation, for, selecting one of the smallest animals, he first sent up a stalwart constable, then, ordering two others to push from below, he was gradually, but painfully, hauled on to his perch, maintaining his position by sitting astride the narrow pad instead of sideways as is usual.

We now started, and soon reached the jungle—a comparatively small one, though connected by a narrow strip of grass with a much larger patch about two hundred yards off. Taking up my position in the centre of this grass, I directed the inspector, who, in virtue of his rank, I appointed second in command, to take himself and his forces to the far side of the cover, and to beat it up towards me.

He marched off, full of importance, and having marshalled his five elephants into something approaching a line, proceeded to carry out my instructions. From where I was posted I could see the taller elephants of the line, as it advanced in my direction, and I was expecting every moment to hear the tiger break.

Suddenly there was a loud squeal from one of the elephants, followed by a general commotion all along the

line, caused I guessed by the tiger having been either viewed or scented, so I made signs as well as I could for the line to be pushed on. The drivers did their best to obey, but, in spite of all their efforts, not an animal would advance—and small wonder, for there, barely ten yards in front of them, was the tiger, growling savagely !

At last one elephant, less timid than the rest, was induced to move a step or two forward. The next instant there was a savage roar, and every elephant, big and small, rushed helter-skelter back through the jungle, and soon the whole line could be seen careering madly across the open on its way back to the village, the inspector's charge, more nimble than the rest, leading the van !

I have seen some comical sights in my life, but never in all my experience one more utterly ludicrous than what was now before me, *i.e.* the huge jelly-bag figure of the unfortunate official, encased in tight uniform, poised on the highest point of the little animal he bestrode, clutching frantically at anything he could find in his efforts to maintain his seat, and shouting at the driver to stop, yet betraying his anxiety to get on as quickly as possible by digging his heels into what he probably imagined to be the ribs of his pony, forgetful for the moment that he was now mounted on an elephant ! The latter, with his tail in the air and his trunk upraised, bustled along as fast as his sturdy little legs could carry him, squealing with terror. Indeed, elephants and men lent themselves to making up as droll a scene as it is possible to conceive. However, I had little time to enjoy this *impromptu* burlesque, and soon had graver matters to attend to, for, while still laughing, a loud coughing snort was heard in front, and before I could raise my gun to my shoulder, with a quick rush through the grass the tiger had passed behind me. I turned and fired both barrels into the moving grass, but apparently without result, and ere I could reload he was out of range.

I now looked again for the elephants, only to find that I could hope for no assistance from *them*. They were still going, and likely to continue doing so. In despair I consulted my driver, and, acting on his advice, having no experience of my own to draw on, decided to go in pursuit

of the tiger, in the faint hope that one of my shots might have taken sufficient effect to prevent him journeying far.

But to pursue an angry tiger on a timid and untrained elephant was not so easy a matter, for to do so it was obviously necessary, in the first place, to make a start, and this the terrified animal absolutely refused to do. In fact, it was only with the greatest difficulty that we succeeded in making him even face in the proper direction. At length, thoroughly exasperated, I allowed the driver to use his "kujbag," or goad, a terrible weapon, resembling a monster fish-hook, the shank projecting beyond the curve, and terminating in a sharp spike. But this only made matters worse, for, instead of moving forward, the animal now commenced to back, and then to "shake," a term applied to elephants and denoting one of their most dangerous vices. In effect, it is much the same as buck-jumping in a horse, but the motion, instead of being longitudinal, is from side to side, and so violent that a really proficient "shaker" will often rid himself of his riders, literally "in a brace of shakes." This is what would have probably happened in our case. Providentially a peacock, rustling through the grass behind us, created a diversion, for the elephant, thinking the tiger was now behind him, started forward, and away we went, a great deal faster than we wanted, but in the right direction.

We had flashed through the grass and reached the larger cover before we could pull up our runaway mount, and, having soothed him into a more suitable frame of mind to negotiate the dangerous tree jungle now before us, entered it, proceeding cautiously, as we might come upon the tiger at any moment.

We had proceeded in this manner about two hundred yards when we came to a small clearing some thirty yards wide. Traversing this we were about to re-enter the jungle, when, without the smallest warning, the tiger, with a roar appalling in its volume and ferocity, sprang at the elephant's head.

Rendered wary by the extreme suddenness of his previous appearance, I was fortunately prepared, and, as he sprang, fired both barrels almost simultaneously, the

next moment tumbling backwards into the howdah, as the elephant, turning sharp round, made off for all he was worth in the direction from which we had come.

Now came the most unpleasant half-hour I have ever gone through. The jungle, as already stated, was what is known as tree jungle, and therefore one to be traversed with extreme care and caution, and of necessity very lowly, when in a howdah. The reader may, therefore, imagine my feelings when, on recrossing the small clearing, we dashed into the cover at railway speed, regardless alike of branches, thorns, and creepers, and tore through them at a rate which, though necessarily reduced, was yet sufficient to sweep off howdah, guns and riders, landing the latter, perhaps, into the very mouth of the tiger, who, for all we knew, might be pursuing us !

How we escaped being brained, or at least swept off, I have no conception, for, as in most situations of the kind, it all seemed to happen so quickly that we never quite knew what actually did happen. One very vivid recollection, however—which a bump the size of an egg on my forehead helped me to recall for some days after—was a violent collision with a large branch. The bump aforesaid was not the only evidence of this *rencontre*, for on looking for my pith hat afterwards, all I could find of it was the rim, the crown being found later in the branches of a tree ! We had also apparently collided with one or two other hard substances, for my coat was badly torn about the shoulders, both of which felt extremely sore. The mahout, being seated much lower, had come off comparatively scatheless, except for some scratches on the face and hands, and a deep one on the side of the foot, evidently, as he said, from the tiger's claw.

Our elephant, even after reaching the open, had continued its headlong flight ; in fact, he did not pull up till he met the others, now returning from their little excursion to the village. Giving the elephants, including my own, time to recover from the fright and to pull themselves together, I returned with them to the scene of my late encounter with a view to renewing hostilities.

Reaching the place, the first object that met our gaze was the tiger, or, rather, *tigress* (for so she proved to be),

stretched out, stone dead, on the very spot where my elephant had been when she charged. Quickly dismounting, I examined the body and found one bullet hole just below the throat, and another in the fleshy part of the thigh, the first obviously the shot that had killed her, and the second one of the two fired as she dashed past behind me on her first appearance.

Both these shots could only be regarded as unusually lucky flukes, especially the first, which had probably saved us an extremely unpleasant, not to say perilous, quarter of an hour. As it was, the tigress must have completed her spring, judging from the mahout's statement, as corroborated by the claw wound.

We now measured our prize, and found her to be nine feet four inches from tip of nose to tip of tail—a rare length for a tigress. Being in the prime of life and condition, her skin was an exceptionally fine one, and, when cured and hung up in my bungalow, served to recall for many a year after the pleasant and exciting incidents connected with the slaying of " My First Tiger."

A MUCH-PRIZED TROPHY.

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CHAPTER IV

PROMOTION—though generally only temporary—was very rapid in the new Police Service during the earlier years of its creation, owing to the fact that most of the senior officers were military men who had had no leave since the Mutiny broke out. Hence as the juniors gradually gained experience in their duties and became fit to take charge of districts, many superintendents took advantage of the leave which was now being freely granted.

Thus it came about that shortly after Major C—— had come back and resumed charge I was appointed to act as Superintendent of J——, a small district in the northern portion of the province, and ordered to join immediately as the permanent incumbent had been granted leave, and was waiting to be released.

The District was one I had often heard spoken of as the wildest and best shooting district in Lower Bengal—being off the beaten track and thinly populated, with miles of dense jungle extending along its northern border, said to be infested with every variety of big game, including elephants and rhinoceros.

I was naturally much pleased at my good fortune, for had I been given my choice of districts, I could not have selected one more to my taste; consequently within three days of receiving the order, I was on my way to join, and forty-eight hours later, was duly installed as acting-superintendent of the district, and thenceforth known to its inhabitants as the "Nya Cuptane Sahib," or the "New Captain."

But as this seemingly easy method of acquiring military rank may puzzle non-Anglo-Indians, I must arrest my narrative a moment to explain the curious process by which I obtained it. As already stated, when the constabulary was raised most of the superintendents

were military men—colonels, majors, and captains, as the case might be, and such titles being more familiar to natives than the new, strange-sounding one of superintendent, the chief police officer of each district came to be designated the " Culnail," " Majur " or " Cuptane " sahib —according to the rank held by its first superintendent.

As time went on, and these officers were transferred from one district to another, this peculiarity led to some comical complications—as for instance in the case of a colonel who happening to be sent to a district where the force had been raised by a captain, would find himself reduced to that rank, for strive as he might against it, to his subordinates and the people he was always the Cuptane sahib, and would remain so to the end. My own case was even more peculiar, for in my last district, as second in command I had been called the " chota " or little " Majur sahib," but now, although a much more important personage, was only a captain. However, I consoled myself with the reflection that to be a full-grown minnow was perhaps a more dignified position than being only half a triton.

But to come back to my adventures. My new district was a small one—that is as regards population, for quite one-third of it being forest the number of inhabitants was considerably below the average, and, consequently also, the staff of officials — the district magistrate, the civil surgeon, a forest officer and myself making up the sum total. The work—as is generally the case in such districts —was extremely light, the result being that the officials having plenty of leisure, had almost of necessity—game being so plentiful—developed into keen sportsmen, and throughout the camping season generally contrived to camp together for a week or two at a time. The recollection of these periodical foregatherings are amongst the pleasantest of the many pleasant incidents in my Indian life which I can still recall, though it was at one of these reunions—about three months after I had joined—that we experienced an adventure which was perhaps too perilously exciting to be quite enjoyable at the time. I had been about twelve months in the district when one morning I received a report from the head constable

THE "BADMASH."

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in charge of one of my northern outposts, that a tiger had taken up its quarters in a jungle adjoining a group of villages, and was destroying cattle at a rate which threatened to cause serious damage to the villagers concerned. Accompanying this report was a petition from the latter praying that the sahib would come out and shoot the beast at once. Now as it happened we had already arranged to spend the coming Christmas holidays at a camp in another part of the district, but as the speedy destruction of this particular tiger was obviously more important than hunting for others less actively aggressive, we decided to combine business with pleasure and hunt this one instead.

We accordingly sent orders for our tents to be transplanted as speedily as possible, and a couple of days later we—that is, the district magistrate, the forest officer, the doctor and myself—found ourselves encamped on a large plain within easy distance of the jungle we proposed to investigate.

Elephants had previously been collected from all parts of the district, and, including four staunch animals for the "howdahs," numbered about twenty. Amongst these was a gigantic brute of very uncertain temper, commonly known as the "Budmash" or "wicked one," which had earned this evil reputation by various attempts to kill its mahouts or drivers. Of late the animal had shown no disposition to be dangerous, till the day before this incident, when, on returning from the jungle, it had exhibited such temper that its grass-cutter, who always walked behind, armed with a long spear, had been compelled to use it, the punishment evidently having the desired effect, for the beast seemingly became quite cowed and docile. Thus, when, early the next morning, information was brought in of a "kill" outside the forest, the "Budmash," now to all appearances as tractable as the rest, was sent out with the other elephants to the jungle to form one of the beating line. An hour or two later we rod out on ponies to the cover, where, mounting our respective "howdahs," we took up our positions, while the "line" beat through the jungle, only to find a cow partially eaten, but no other signs of the tiger, excepting some fresh tracks leading into the forest.

As it was useless to follow him there, we decided to employ the morning in beating through some grass, on the chance of finding him lying up there. But the cover was too extensive, and after a few hours the attempt was given up as hopeless, and, returning to the starting point, the elephants were sent back to the camp, while we, remounting our ponies, rode on to inspect a distant village.

About four o'clock in the evening we were riding back to camp, and, as we neared the tents, saw a crowd of people running in our direction, shouting as they ran, and evidently much excited. Above the din they were creating could occasionally be heard the words "Mardalla!" "Mardalla!" signifying that some one had been killed; and presently an elephant without pad or rider was seen following closely on the crowd.

Taking in the situation at a glance, we urged our ponies forward, and riding through the panic-stricken throng, placed ourselves between it and the animal. The movement, as was anticipated, checked the beast's advance, and, standing irresolute for a moment, it went off to one side, revealing as it turned the huge proportions of the "Budmash," with a chain attached to one of its hind legs trailing on the ground. The fact of the chain having a picket at the end of it, and that the animal was riderless, afforded some explanation of what had taken place, and its mahout, who formed one of the crowd, soon supplied the rest.

It appeared that the elephants on their return to camp, had been divested of their trappings, and while they were being tied up for the night, the "Budmash" had made a sudden attack upon its grass-cutter, who was at the moment stooping down in front of it, fastening its fore feet. The man managed to jump out of its reach, and ran towards a bamboo clump for shelter, but the animal straining at its picket, soon tore it from the ground, and followed in pursuit. The terrified attendant, on reaching the clump, attempted to force his way into it, but before he could accomplish this the elephant was upon him, and with one sweep of its trunk dashed him to the ground. Stunned by the violence of the fall, the man lay motionless for a while, and, had he remained so, might possibly

have escaped; but, his senses coming back to him, he made a slight movement, whereupon the animal rushed at him again, and trampling him under foot, seized the body with its trunk and hurled it to some distance, then, following quickly up, stood over it, as if watching for any spark of life remaining.

Meanwhile its mahout, who, accompanied by the others, had followed the maddened brute, now pluckily attempted to re-establish his authority. Alone, and armed only with the spear, he advanced towards the animal, shouting out his orders in loud and threatening tones. But this seemed to increase the fury of the beast, which again attacked its victim, and kneeling on the body, soon reduced it to a mass of shapeless flesh. Finally, as if unsatisfied with the havoc it had wrought, it again seized the poor remains, and, lifting them high in the air, dashed them to the ground, then, turning suddenly, charged down upon the mahout. Fortunately the latter, realizing that the animal was now beyond his power to control, had already retired to some distance, and his companions, seeing the elephant making for him, shouted loudly, arresting its progress for the moment, and enabling him to rejoin them. Then, as the beast again advanced, they retreated in a body, the elephant following them till checked by the ponies, as described.

But although the danger was over for the moment, the situation was critical in the extreme; for night was now approaching, and, with a savage elephant at large, and not a tree or any other shelter within a mile, there was no means of escape, should the animal attack the camp, as was more than probable it would in its present dangerous condition. To add to the gravity of the situation the night was likely to be unusually dark, for there was no moon, and heavy clouds were gathering overhead, which would shut out what little light the stars might otherwise have afforded. Under these circumstances there was but one thing to be done, and that quickly, for the beast's disordered brain might at any moment prompt it to charge into the tents. As there was no knowing from which direction it would come, the only protection possible was to surround the camp with fires. A stack of wood was fortunately

at hand. This was soon dismantled and smaller stacks erected at intervals all round. By the time the circle was completed, darkness had set in.

As the last stack was set alight the clanking of a chain, sounding louder every moment, announced that the elephant was approaching, and soon the bright light from the fires revealed its monstrous shape looming out of the gloom. With uplifted trunk, and ears cocked forward, it advanced boldly up to the fires, as though intending to dash through; but suddenly its courage seemed to fail. Pausing for an instant, it turned and retreated to some distance, then, skirting round the camp again, attacked it from the rear.

But here, the clanking of the chain again betraying its approach, the fires were stoked up, and a blazing pile of faggots once more checked the beast's advance. Nevertheless, with stubborn perseverance it carried on the siege; and though at last, finding every point thus guarded, it ceased to attack, it continued for some time prowling round the camp. Meanwhile we experienced many an anxious moment, as we stood behind the fires, expecting every instant to hear the beast returning. At last, however, to our relief, the animal moved off, as we could tell from the clanking of its chain gradually growing fainter till it died away in the distance.

We now hoped to enjoy an interval of rest; but an hour or two later the clanking recommenced, seemingly where the elephants were tethered, and soon a chorus of human voices, mingled with loud trumpetings and squeals, was heard in this direction, followed by what appeared to be a general stampede amongst these animals. But, as was subsequently ascertained, it was the drivers and their attendants who, hearing the beast approaching, had purposely untethered all their elephants, and now, mounted on their respective charges, were trying to surround and capture the intruder. However, they had soon to abandon the attempt, for the animal was too dangerous to approach. Charging furiously several times, it finally overturned one of the smaller elephants, and, breaking through the others, made off in the direction of the forest.

This was the last that was seen of the animal that

night, but the clanking of the chain, heard from time to time, kept the watchers at their posts, ready to stoke up the fires at once, should the beast return. This long and trying vigil was shared by all alike, for, as in all such dangerous situations, no one cared to sleep and entrust his safety to another. Hence every ear was strained to catch the dreaded sound which—while the forerunner of their peril—was yet their only safeguard, owing to the intense darkness of the night.

Thus the weary hours dragged on, each seeming longer than the last, till, just as dawn was breaking, two wood-cutters came running to the camp, shouting excitedly that the elephant was about the attack their village, and begging that the sahibs would come to their assistance. This was very serious news, as the village in question was a mere cluster of grass and bamboo huts, affording no protection against such an attack, and, moreover, contained many women and children.

In these circumstances some immediate action was obviously necessary, though what should be done was difficult to determine. However, after a hasty consultation with the mahouts, it was decided that two of us, on our ponies, should gallop to the village and try to scare the beast away, then, if possible, drive it to the elephant encampment, where, now that it was daylight, another attempt might be made to capture it.

No time was lost in putting this plan into execution, and on arrival at the village the animal was discovered standing in the middle of a "paddy" crop, part of which it had demolished in the night. It was now seemingly contemplating the ruin it had wrought; but the rustling made by the ponies pushing through the paddy soon aroused it, and whisking suddenly round, it made as if about to charge. This was a trying moment for the riders, who were now completely at the mercy of the beast. Providentially the extraordinary fear that all elephants have of horses proved the stronger emotion, and turning round again, the "Budmash" retreated through the paddy.

The riders followed slowly till they had reached the open, then, galloping on in front, they headed the beast towards the camp, and after some difficult manœuvring

drove it amongst the other elephants. These had meanwhile been unchained, and, mounted by their drivers, were kept standing at their pickets; but as the brute approached they gradually closed round it. The animal, finding itself surrounded, made frantic efforts to break through the living wall, but many of the elephants were as powerful as itself; some, moreover, were armed with sharp tusks which, under their drivers' orders, they made use of with considerable effect.

Meanwhile the "runaway's" mahout, seated on one of these "tuskers" behind the driver, was directing the operations, and as the circle closed round the struggling beast, watching his opportunity, he suddenly sprang on its neck, and, slipping his feet quickly through the rope stirrups, established himself securely. The elephant, taken by surprise, ceased struggling for the moment, then, realizing the situation, redoubled its efforts to get free. Swaying violently from side to side, so far as space would admit, it attempted to shake its rider off, and failing in this, tried to seize him with its trunk. But the man was now its master. Comparatively safe in the position he occupied, and armed with his formidable driving-hook, he used it with unsparing energy, delivering his blows with all the force he could command, and occasionally driving the point of the weapon deep into the skull, till the animal screamed with pain and fury. The punishment, though severe, was under the circumstances absolutely necessary, since there was no other means of bringing the beast under control. Yet, in spite of this rough handling, it fought desperately for a time, and until the other elephants pressed so closely round it as to prevent its struggling longer.

The animal was now fairly at the mercy of its rider. Completely hemmed in by the huge bodies of its comrades, it was as incapable of movement as if enclosed within four walls, while the blows continuing to descend upon its head with pitiless rapidity soon reduced it to a state of absolute subjection.

The surrounding elephants were now withdrawn, and the animal ordered to "baith," and then to "maill"—signifying respectively to "kneel down" and "get up."

These movements were repeated several times, till the mahout, satisfied that the beast was once more under his control, rode it to its old quarters. There he got off, and, restoring the picket to its place, stooped down and calmly secured the animal's front leg !

This extraordinarily daring feat concluded a performance as remarkable for the audacity of its conception as for the cool, deliberate courage exhibited by the man throughout the whole proceedings. Many a daring deed is done on the impulse of the moment which, if well considered, might never have been performed. But this was not one of those, for the man knew well from its inception the risks he was undertaking. The terrible tragedy he had witnessed only the day before was in itself sufficient warning of his fate, should he fail in his attempt; and yet he was but a weak, puny-looking creature, whom no one to look at would believe possessed any of the rare qualities he had shown. However, such is often the material of which heroes are made, and many a cross " For Valour " has been won by men of like physique, when stronger men have been content to stand by and look on !

I may add that some three months after this incident, the elephant broke out again one morning when returning from its bath, and, throwing its mahout, who fortunately escaped by climbing up a tree, made off into the forest. There it was tracked, and despite the man's entreaties to be allowed to capture it again, was ultimately hunted down and shot.

Meanwhile the tiger we had come out to kill—probably frightened by the tumult—had apparently made off, for though we beat for it daily during our stay, no further sign of it was found. However, as the cattle slaying ceased entirely we felt that our trouble had not been in vain.

CHAPTER V

SOME years later it was my good fortune to be posted to a district lying at the foot of the Bhutan hills. This district had nothing to recommend it in the matter of salubrity, indeed it was notoriously unhealthy, nor as regards pleasant society, for there were only three Europeans at the headquarters station besides myself; but to the sportsman it was a veritable paradise, containing more jungle and more big game than any other twenty districts put together. My duties took me everywhere, for even in the most remote "jungle tracts" there were stations or outposts to be visited at least twice a year. To these places, naturally, there were no regular roads, hence I was provided by Government with two elephants as transport. Fortunately for me both these animals were exceptionally staunch (one of them remarkably so), a quality extremely rare with ordinary Government elephants, many of whom will bolt on the first indication of a tiger or other large animal being seen near them in a jungle.

One very warm July morning I was working in my office, when one of the village police, accompanied by the "khubburriah" (literally, one who gives information), came in to report that a tiger had killed a large bullock, belonging to the latter, in his village, and was at the moment they left enjoying an early meal off his victim. This was cheering news, but as a pair of leopards had been fairly busy with the cattle of this particular neighbourhood of late, and as the weather was exceptionally hot, I determined upon testing the information before taking any action, and accordingly sent at once for my sporting *fidus Achates*, one Birdul Thappa, an old Ghoorka native officer, whom I had placed in charge of the elephants, one of the pluckiest of his tribe, and a sportsman to the tips of his dumpy fingers.

This individual on arrival questioned both the rural policeman and khubburriah most closely, but their story was so consistent, and their conviction apparently so strong as to the "kill" being that of a tiger, that we finally decided to send the elephants out at once with howdah and guns in charge of the old Ghoorka, who it was arranged was to make a local investigation, and if from the size of the pugs and other indications he was satisfied that the culprit was a tiger, he was to send me a telegram from the railway station, which, fortunately, was only a mile from the jungle. To save delay, I gave him a form duly filled up and addressed to myself with one word only —"Come!"

After despatching the elephants on what I thought would be a wild goose chase, I worked myself up to a proper state of resignation, and so successfully, that by the evening I thought I had quite convinced myself that tiger shooting in July was a mistake, and to go out for a whole day in such weather nothing short of madness. With this comforting conviction, I dismissed from my mind all thoughts of the possible tiger, and about 10 p.m. prepared to turn in, quite pleased to think that, as it was now too late for the telegram, I could go to bed comfortably without any fear of being woke up at some unearthly hour of the night. However, "L'homme proposes, etc.," for I had hardly begun to undress when the telegram arrived, and forgetting in an instant all my good resolutions and convictions, I tore it open, and found, to my inexpressible delight, that one word only—"Come!"

As the point where the elephants were to meet me was eleven miles off, I ordered a pony to be sent out halfway at two o'clock, and leaving strict injunctions to be called at five myself, turned in, feeling much happier, I must confess, than when under the influence of my good resolutions a few minutes before.

Punctually to the minute a weird-looking figure, clad in white, itself only half awake, was at the bedside apparently endeavouring to make me understand "that it had gone five o'clock, and that the 'little breakfast' was on the table." It was some minutes before I realized why he was annoying me so persistently at this early hour, but

as the recollection of the last night's telegram suddenly flashed across my sleepy brain, I was out of bed in a second, and inside my shooting kit just as réveille was sounding in the Police Barracks close by, and ten minutes later was bowling along at some ten miles an hour through the comparatively cool morning air.

The sun was hardly up as I just neared the eleventh milestone, and soon I saw the two elephants looming in the distance like monster spectres in the grey morning light. The old Ghoorka, perched on top of the pad, received me with a broad grin on his weather-beaten face, and knowing from past experience what this meant, I lost no time in asking questions, but clambered up at once into the howdah and started for the jungle about a mile off the road. On the way the old man informed me that immediately on his arrival the previous afternoon he had visited the field where the tiger was reported to have seized the bullock, and soon discovered the spot indicated by traces of a struggle, with patches of blood here and there, and in some soft mud close by the unmistakable pugs of a full grown tiger; leading from this spot to a small but very dense jungle about 200 yards off was a broad track in the short grass with the tiger's pugs occasionally showing in the mud. This track was found to lead up and into the jungle; the old man had followed it some way till he was satisfied that the "kill" had been dragged into some very thick covert, then prudently retired, quite sure that the tiger was there; however, to make assurance doubly sure, he carefully examined the jungle, but could find no pugs leading out, though on the banks of the stream running on one side of the belt of jungle he noticed that the tiger had come down to drink during the night, but had returned to the kill.

This appeared to be quite good enough, so on arrival at the jungle I posted myself at once at one end of the long strip, taking up a position which I thought would command the stream which was to my right, and sent the pad elephant round by the open to my left, with directions to enter the jungle as low down as possible, and beat up towards me in a zigzag fashion.

To understand what followed it is necessary to explain

that to my right, across the stream, there was a deeply-wooded ravine running at right angles to the jungle I was beating and to the stream, and of considerable length, the mouth of this ravine being about a hundred yards to my right front.

About an hour after the pad elephant left me I could hear her in the distance crashing through the jungle, occasionally tearing down boughs and branches. This continued for some time, but soon I heard her giving vent to her feelings in low rumblings, and that peculiar drum sound that elephants make with their trunks when they catch sight of or smell any large animal moving in the jungle before them; this was varied occasionally by shrill trumpet sounds. I knew from these sounds that the tiger was not only at home, but evidently afoot, possibly close before me, as tigers generally move a long way before the beating line. I was ready for him, with my eyes glued to the edge of the jungle to my front. Suddenly, to my intense disgust, I heard a loud roar about a hundred yards to my right front, almost immediately followed by a plunge and splash, and before I had time to realize what had happened, or to bring my rifle to the shoulder, the tiger plunged across the narrow stream and disappeared into the ravine.

However, the jungle he had entered was, from my point of view, the best place he could have gone to; so, calling the beater elephant, we followed in line, carefully beating the dense covert till we reached the end where the ravine terminated abruptly in a perpendicular wall of clay covered by shrubs, but there was no tiger to be seen. We beat the covert again and again with the same result. I then took my elephant out to see whether there was any covert on the further side of the wall, and found there was, and that it was quite large enough to hold the tiger. I beat this covert carefully, but with no better success. I then came to the conclusion that there must be some hole or cave in the front face of the wall which the beast might be concealed in, so returned to the original ravine, and, after a long and careful search, discovered an opening about two feet in diameter, well hidden behind the shrubs.

I saw there was only one thing to be done now, viz. to

discover first if there was a similar opening on the other side, and, if so, take up my position near it, and make Birdul fire his carbine into the front hole. This was accordingly done without delay, but though the old man fired some half dozen rounds, and I repeated the performance from my side with No. 6 shot, nothing came out, nor was there anything to indicate that there was an animal inside. I was now fairly puzzled, and could only conclude that we had walked over the brute in the ravine, so returned to the entrance and beat it up most carefully till not a portion was left untrodden. Still there was nothing to be seen of the tiger, though from the behaviour of the elephants I was convinced he was somewhere near. The old Ghoorka was completely nonplussed, and declared his firm conviction that the tiger was no tiger at all, but a " bhoot " (a phantom). However, as I had never heard of tigers posing as ghosts, I determined to go back and look for him in the original covert, thinking he might have slunk back across the stream, lying close during our first beat of the ravine till we had passed. I accordingly looked about for a place to get out, as I had had great difficulty in clambering out the first time, the walls of the ravine being on an average about twenty feet high on both sides. However, I could find no other road out, so had to use this again, and had just reached the top when, to my horror, I saw that old Birdul had got off his elephant, and was deliberately walking up the bottom of the ravine towards the hole in the wall, anathematizing the spectre tiger in the strongest language, but at the same time looking for his pugs in the soft mud which was visible here and there in bare places. I called to him to get on the elephant at once, but the words were hardly out of my mouth when there was a deafening roar, and the next moment a huge mass of black and yellow sprang from the hole right on to the poor old man. The latter kept his head, and, with marvellous coolness, fell flat on his face as he saw the beast coming, thinking he would spring past and over him.

But the tiger naturally was not in the best of tempers. He had been driven off his kill, and had been considerably hustled and worried, and he meant business now; so

instead of springing over, he deliberately jumped on the unfortunate man. Then followed a scene the recollection of which haunts me still. Being some twenty feet above I could not see very clearly what was actually going on, as the huge body of the tiger completely covered the old man, but the loud angry growls of the brute and the manner in which he appeared to be biting and tearing with his teeth and claws was too horrible to witness, more especially as I was powerless to render any assistance. To fire was impossible, and it would have been madness to have attempted it, as I could not possibly have hit the tiger without hitting the man. Moreover, unless I could kill him instantaneously, I should only infuriate him more, and with the brute moving every second, it was impossible to make sure of hitting him in a vital part. The temptation, however, to do so was hard to resist. The rifle was in my hand and at full cock; I brought it to my shoulder, my elephant was as steady as a rock, and I was just about to risk a shot at the tiger's head, when providentially it occurred to me that a sudden noise might cause him to release his victim; so calling upon the mahout (elephant driver) and my orderly sitting behind me to join, we yelled and shouted with all our might, and so hideously appalling must have been the noise we made that we had hardly begun when the tiger sprang off the man and into the jungle. All that I have described occupied actually about two minutes—probably less. I have no recollection of how I dismounted or got down the bank, which was almost perpendicular, but was told afterwards that I swarmed down by the elephant's ear as he stood, and took the bank at a run.

Be this as it may, I was off the elephant and alongside the old man before he had time to realize that the tiger had left him, and to my intense relief found him not only alive, but quite conscious and collected, though one mass of blood from head to foot, his white clothing crimson. With the assistance of my orderly and some villagers who had been hanging about some distance off we carried him to the village, and placing him under the shade of a tree, I washed his wounds with whisky and water, and bound them up as well as I could. He had twenty-seven wounds

in all, some of them from teeth and others from claws. Most of them were on the right arm, which the tiger had apparently gripped hard, possibly with the intention of carrying him off. There was one very serious claw wound on the right eyebrow, just missing the eye itself. The old man, though in great pain, kept his senses, and begged hard that I would leave him and kill the tiger, for, according to his superstition, if the tiger lived, he must die.

The terrible scene I had just witnessed had, as may be imagined, driven all thoughts of any further sport for that day out of my mind, but as the injured man begged so hard that the tiger should be killed, and as it was absolutely necessary for his recovery that he should have nothing on his mind to worry him and probably bring on fever, I made him as comfortable as I could with the cushions out of the trap, and telling him to cheer up, as I would soon be back with the tiger dead, I took the two elephants, and beating down the ravine in case he should be lying up there, I made for the original covert.

The ravine, however, proved a blank, but no sooner had I posted myself in the position I had at first occupied and put the beater elephant in than out came the tiger, charging straight at my elephant. I fired both barrels, which turned him, and he made off limping to my left, and took up his position in a very dense bit of covert about four hundred yards off. I followed him up at once, and posted myself in front of this covert, putting the beater in at the far end ; but she had hardly entered when the tiger charged and drove her out. This was repeated several times, so, fearing that he might injure the elephant or the people on her, I called out to the orderly not to go in again, as I was coming round myself, which I did, and leaving the beater outside to watch an outlet, I went in, and had just reached a small patch of comparatively open ground when the tiger, crashing through the covert at the far end, came charging down. I fired as he was about ten yards off, and fortunately made a splendid shot through the left shoulder.

The tremendous pace he was going caused him to turn a complete somersault, and there he lay, as I thought, stone dead at the elephant's feet, and I had actually

seated the elephant and was just getting off to measure him, when he got up and crawled back into the covert, getting a shot through the spine as he did so, which practically settled him, though it required another shot through the head to finish him completely.

He proved to be a full-grown and very massive young tiger, but having an unusually short tail, he only measured 9 feet 6 inches.

My delight at having secured him, and with such comparative ease, can be better imagined than described, and I lost no time in getting him on to the pad, as I knew that old Birdul must have heard the firing, and would be anxious to know the result. Never shall I forget his look of delight as he saw us approaching, with the head and tail of the tiger falling well over each side of the pad; and I believe this sight did more towards curing him than all the careful treatment he subsequently received.

As we got near he called out to me, "It's all right now, sahib" (sir)—"you have killed the tiger and saved my life." But it was now high time to get him off to the hospital, so putting him up in the dog-cart, I made the ponies go as they had never gone before, and did the eleven miles just within the hour. At the hospital I insisted on the assistant there making a thorough search, to ensure none of the bites or scratches being overlooked, and had each one well burnt with nitrate of silver in my presence, and so effectually, that the old man fairly writhed with the pain, and declared that the tiger had not hurt him half so much.

However, the result was that in three months' time he was discharged, perfectly cured, and with hardly a mark on him. At one time there were slight symptoms of blood-poisoning, but these yielded to careful treatment, and some six weeks later the plucky old Ghoorka was out tiger shooting with me as usual, though I gave him clearly to understand that there was to be no more getting off the elephant, and that the first time he disobeyed these orders he would be put on frontier guard duty. He certainly never did get off the elephant again without permission, but I verily believe this was more from fear of being deprived of the pleasure of accompanying me on my shooting excursions than from any sense of danger to himself.

CHAPTER VI

THE curious belief held by the old "Ghoorka"—as mentioned in my last adventure—reminds me of an extraordinary story told me some years later by a brother officer who, in the course of his inquiry into a murder case, in the Garo Hill District, where he was stationed, came upon a still more curious instance of native superstition which led to the murder being ultimately detected.

The story is such a strange one, that did I not know it to be true, I would have had some hesitation in adding it to my collection of out-of-the-way events which it was my practice to record. This one I considered of more than ordinary interest, for of all the curious races of mankind by whom the vast Empire of India is peopled, there are few more strange or interesting than the Garos of Assam. Living in the seclusion of their isolated villages, scattered here and there amid the low, densely wooded hills which bear their name, this strange, semi-savage tribe of demon-worshippers have retained to this day many of their primitive traits and superstitions. Amongst their extraordinary traditions, and one that forms the subject of the story, is the belief that if a Garo tells a falsehood he will meet with a sudden and violent death. So strictly do they adhere to this belief that a Garo, if required to take an oath, will solemnly say, "May I be killed by a wild elephant if I do not speak the truth!"

At the time the incident occurred there lived in one of the lonely villages above-mentioned a Garo maiden remarkable for her beauty and fascination. Michmi, for so this village belle was named, was the daughter of a man of no importance, and poor withal, even for a Garo; but this in no way detracted from the number of her admirers, which included half the bachelor population of the village.

Amongst them was her cousin Pembu, a good-looking, stalwart youth, who had long loved her with all the fervour of his wild and ardent nature. The girl returned his love as ungrudgingly as it was bestowed, for, added to his comely face and manly bearing, Pembu was possessed of many other virtues calculated to win a savage maiden's heart. He could shoot an arrow further and with truer aim than any youth or veteran in the village, and was, moreover, a bold and successful hunter, while in running, jumping, wrestling, and such-like feats of strength there was none to equal him.

But Pembu had a rival, and a very dangerous one—no less a person than the headman's son. Kishto, the youth in question, was one of the so-called " enlightened " type of Garo, an educated savage, despising his less-cultured brethren and holding in contempt the ancient traditions of his race.

This man had long cherished a secret affection for the pretty Michmi, and had once been rash enough to declare his passion, an indiscretion which cost him many hours of bodily pain and mental torture, for the girl had complained to her lover, who, mad with fury, had sought out the offender and administered so severe a castigation that the wretched youth was laid up for a month. Now Kishto, being of poor physique and of a cowardly disposition, dared not retaliate in kind, but none the less resented the treatment he had received, and swore openly to be avenged. Though lacking physical strength and pluck, he was shrewd and cunning to a degree, and it was not long before he had devised a scheme which promised to give him the revenge he thirsted for, and also the possession of the girl. Among the few friends he had in the village was a mean-spirited creature like himself, a man who was also ill-disposed towards Pembu. Finding this individual ready and willing to aid him in his evil project, Kishto resolved to carry it out at once.

A few paces from the hut where Pembu lived was one occupied by a money-lender, an old and feeble man, who lived alone. By reason of the extortionate rate of interest he demanded he was not a very popular person in the village.

One morning, shortly after Kishto and his accommodating friend had arranged their little scheme, a villager going to the old usurer's hut to reclaim some jewellery he had pledged, was horrified to find him lying dead inside. At once he raised an outcry, and soon the whole village had collected. Among the first to arrive upon the scene was the headman, who, by virtue of his position, was legally bound to hold an investigation. He ascertained that the old man had been stabbed through the heart, the motive for the crime being evidently plunder, for not a single coin or ornament was to be found inside the hut.

The murderer had left no clue of any kind behind him, and but for a suggestion made by the astute Kishto, it is unlikely that any great effort would have been made to trace him.

The wily youth, who had evinced the keenest interest in the proceedings, now suggested that the huts of all persons living in the immediate vicinity should be searched. This suggestion was no sooner made than it was carried out, and, commencing with the nearest, the searchers reached Pembu's hut, where, carefully concealed inside the thatching of the roof, was found a blood-stained knife and two silver anklets. A death-like silence greeted this discovery, for Pembu was beloved by all, and none could believe him guilty of so cruel and dastardly an act as the murder of the old usurer.

But appearances were certainly against him. The knife was undoubtedly his, the one he always used, made for him by his friend the village smith; the anklets, too, were recognized by two women present, who had pledged them with the money-lender a week or two before.

It was a terrible position for the unfortunate youth. With such convincing evidence of his guilt before their eyes, how was it possible for his friends to believe him innocent of the crime? It is true he had missed his knife some days before, but, unfortunately, had made no mention of the fact, and to do so now, he felt, was useless. Still, his was not a nature to be easily cast down, and looking at the sea of faces pressing round him, with sorrow and sympathy depicted on them all, he was encouraged to make an effort.

"My friends," he began, in a voice trembling with emotion, "I am not guilty of this crime. Why should I slay the poor old man, who has never done me harm? It is true the knife that killed him belongs to me; it is useless to deny the fact, for it is well-known to all of you. But how it came here is more than I can say. It was stolen from me some days ago, and the man who stole it is the murderer. The anklets I know nothing of. I will not say more, for how is it possible for me to prove my innocence to you? But you all know and respect our ancient Garo oath, and I will repeat it in your presence." Then, in deep, solemn tones, he repeated the well-known words: "May I be killed by a wild elephant if what I have said is false!"

As Pembu concluded this simple, manly speech, a murmur of applause arose from the assembled multitude, and more than one voice was raised on his behalf.

In spite of the terrible evidence against him, there was now scarcely a man present who believed him guilty of the crime, more especially amongst the elders, the men on whose verdict his liberty, perhaps his life, depended. With all the traditions of their race still strong within them, these Garos of the older school dared not ignore a statement made on such an oath, and were about to pronounce in favour of the youth when, at this critical moment, there was a sudden movement in the crowd, and a man, forcing his way through, called out that he had some important evidence to give.

He said that on the previous night, as he was passing the old man's hut, he had seen Pembu come quickly out of it carrying something in his hand—a knife, it looked like. Finding himself discovered he had run into the jungle. Concluding his statement, the man swore to it on the customary oath.

In a moment the whole attitude of the people changed as if by magic. Here was conclusive evidence of Pembu's guilt, aggravated a hundred-fold in their eyes by his sworn denial of the crime. Some suggested that he should be stoned to death at once; others, that he be bound and cast into the jungle to be dealt with by the beast whose vengeance he had so audaciously invoked. For a time it seemed as if the last suggestion would be carried out at

once ; indeed, the headman and his colleagues found some difficulty in preventing it. However, the influence of the former finally prevailed, and after promising the infuriated crowd that justice would be done, he gave orders for Pembu to be arrested.

The next morning, with his arms tightly bound behind him, and escorted by a gang of his fellow villagers, with the exultant Kishto at their head, the unhappy Pembu was sent into Tura, the headquarters of the district, to stand his trial for the murder.

The journey was a long and perilous one, through dense jungle infested with wild elephants and dangerous beasts of every kind. For these children of Nature, however, as wild and savage as the beasts themselves, these animals had no terrors. Familiarity had bred, if not contempt, at least indifference and they gave no thought to the dangers that surrounded them. Yet there was one amongst them visibly less callous than the rest. This man, when a herd of elephants once crossed the path, had quailed and sought the shelter of a tree. His comrades, noticing this, jeered at him, but little they guessed the real cause of his alarm. The prisoner had noticed it too, and recognized in the skulking wretch the man who had sworn falsely on the sacred oath ; and a ray of light shot through Pembu's clouded brain as he remembered that this was the friend of Kishto, whom he had so severely chastised and who had sworn to be avenged !

All that had seemed a mystery was made clear to him now. The stolen knife and the anklets concealed within his roof—all was explained ; the whole affair was a vile plot of Kishto's to bring about his ruin ! But what availed this discovery to him now ? How was he to prove his own innocence, much less place the responsibility for the crime on those he now knew were guilty of it ? It was true that he had heard that their white rulers at Tura were both merciful and just, but would they believe his unsupported word in face of such evidence as would be brought against him ? No ; it was impossible that they would ! Then his thoughts turned to Michmi, the brave, true-hearted girl who had stood by him throughout. What would be her fate, once in the power of his relentless rival ? The

very thought of her position was agony to him, and, yielding to despair, he burst into a flood of tears.

Travelling all day, the party arrived by nightfall at a small clearing in the forest, and decided to encamp there for the night. They lost little time in preparations, but, making a hasty meal off the provisions they had brought, secured their prisoner to a tree and laid themselves down to sleep.

One of their number, told off to guard the prisoner, watched by the fire awhile, but, tired and sleepy as the rest, he, too, was soon asleep. Pembu would fain have followed his example, but the pain of his bonds, added to the mental torture he endured, kept him awake. He might easily have escaped ; indeed, the idea occurred to him—but where was he to go ?

Hour after hour dragged wearily on ; the fire, uncared for, had burnt slowly down, its dying embers casting a faint and ghost-like light upon the scene. Save for the deep breathing of the sleeping men, there was not a sound to break the silence of the night, and the lonely prisoner, yielding to the influence of his surroundings, at last dropped off to sleep.

It was a curious sight, this group of unarmed, helpless men sleeping peacefully in that dense trackless forest, all unmindful of the dangers that encompassed them—all but one, who, preferring a safer spot, had selected a small grass-grown mound some six feet high.

The night went by, and the first grey light of dawn was showing faintly through the trees when suddenly a succession of sharp, clear notes, as of a trumpet sounding the alarm, broke the death-like stillness. The sleepers started to their feet and listened. Again that dreaded sound was heard, now much nearer. Then, ere the last note of it had ceased, a huge elephant emerged into the open. With trunk upraised and ears pricked forward he paused awhile, trying to locate the spot whence proceeded the scent he had detected. Then with a savage scream of rage he charged down upon the helpless group. But they had anticipated the attack, and before the furious beast could span the distance that divided them, had already gained the shelter of the trees. There was no one left

but Pembu and the trembling wretch upon the mound. The former, lying bound and helpless within the shadow of the tree, remained unnoticed. Not so the other, who, paralysed with fear, made no attempt to escape. Perched on the summit of the mound he was a conspicuous object, even in that uncertain light, and the infuriated elephant sighted him at once. In a stride or two it had reached the mound, and seizing the wretched man with its trunk, dashed him to the ground, placed one huge foot upon his chest, and fairly tore him to pieces, limb by limb! His comrades, watching the awful spectacle from their retreat, were powerless to assist him, and it was not until the savage beast had completed its ghastly work and moved away that they ventured to come out.

The sight they then beheld was one to fill the stoutest heart with terror, for there at their feet lay all that was left of their late comrade—a shapeless mass of flesh and broken bones. They gazed at the terrible spectacle in speechless horror; then one of them pointed to the prisoner, still lying where they had left him, but unharmed! The others read his meaning in the gesture, and wondered, too, why he of all others had been spared—the murderer and violator of the sacred oath, who had so well merited the vengeance of the dreaded beast.

Kishto wondered, too, but for many different reasons—reasons which filled him with dire alarm, despite his vaunted scepticism and contempt for the traditions of his race. The incident had wrought an extraordinary change in the man. He was no longer mindful of the prisoner, but, starting at every rustle of a leaf, looked anxiously around, as if expecting the elephant to return and claim another victim. His companions could not but notice this sudden change, but attributed it to the tragic death of his friend. Collecting their belongings they unfastened Pembu from the tree and all proceeded on their way.

By midday they arrived at Tura and took the prisoner to the court. Kishto, who by this time had regained his ordinary composure, was now directed to state his case. Refusing with scorn to take the Garo oath, he was sworn in the ordinary way and proceeded with his tale. He told his story well until he reached the incident in the clearing,

but here he faltered and seemed unable to proceed. Looking helplessly around the court, his eye fell on the prisoner gazing at him accusingly; in an instant the expression of his face changed, and, apparently obeying a sudden impulse, he threw himself at the magistrate's feet and begged to be forgiven. Then rising to his knees he placed his hands together, and in this humble posture related the true story of the crime.

He told how he and his friend had planned the murder, and how the latter had stabbed the old man while he slept, with Pembu's knife, which they had previously secured. They had concealed it and the anklets in the roof of Pembu's hut, and then falsely accused him of the murder. They would have sworn away his life but for the vengeance of the gods, which had so promptly overtaken his accomplice. Kishto then went on to describe the terrible scene he had witnessed in the forest, and how the recollection of it had haunted him, and ultimately forced him to confess the share he had taken in the crime. Trembling, he paused awhile; then, as if impelled by some feeling he was powerless to resist, he repeated the ancient oath he had just so scornfully rejected.

Pembu and his sweetheart were duly wedded, while the villainous Kishto was hanged for the murder of the old money-lender. And in that little village amid the forest-clad hills the Garo's oath is held more sacred than ever.

CHAPTER VII

I HAD always hitherto done my tiger shooting off the backs of elephants, but was beginning to find that there are times when either the nature of the jungle does not admit of this method being successful, or that the animal, if wary, sneaks off into denser and unpenetrable cover before the beat has commenced, as I had reason to believe had happened on one or two occasions.

Shooting off "machans" or platforms erected over kills was another method I had often heard of, but never tried, as the tediousness and discomfort of sitting up—perhaps the whole night—did not appeal to me. Hence, I had been thinking the matter over, and one evening when encamped with my chum the Forest Officer—near one of his forests—when a plan suddenly occurred to me which not only seemed likely to succeed, but could be attempted with a minimum of discomfort to ourselves.

The notion I had conceived was no less than to erect a small hut on the branches of a tree in the heart of the adjoining forest, over a pool of water where the tiger we were after was said to come regularly to drink, and to live there if necessary for a week!

We had been hunting this animal unsuccessfully several days, and on the night in question were seated round the camp fire after another long, fruitless chase, when the huge branches of the tree beneath which we were sitting had inspired me with this plan, which I at once communicated to my friend.

His reply was not very encouraging. "An excellent idea no doubt," he said, "but how do you propose carrying it out—seeing that we must eat and drink sometimes, and —occasionally—sleep?"

Now, although my companion—despite his many estimable qualities—was of a most aggravatingly practical

disposition, yet I could see that my suggestion had interested him considerably, and being myself convinced of its practicability, I ignored his objections.

Pointing to the branches, overhead, standing out at right angles to the trunk, I showed him how easily they could be utilized for a platform, large and strong enough to support us, and on which we might erect a roomy, comfortable hut where we could live.

My friend, who had been listening with attention, gradually coming round to my opinion, soon became as enthusiastic as myself. "By Jove, I believe it's quite possible," he exclaimed at length, and jumping up excitedly, insisted on our climbing the tree at once to see how the platform should be made.

The remainder of the evening we devoted to working out the scheme, aided by our "factotum," one Dhundhos-Dobhassia by name, nominally our shikari, but whom we generally consulted in all matters, for he was an extraordinarily knowledgeable old man.

Originally a semi-savage creature he had, so to speak, been captured in his youth by one of my friend's predecessors, and though now partially civilized, still retained much of his knowledge of the jungles and of the beasts they contained, while as a "handy man" in camp, his equal could not be found.

He could turn his hand to anything, from driving a refractory elephant to making up our beds, and, sometimes, at a pinch, had even cooked our dinner. On hearing our proposal, he entered into the scheme with all the enthusiasm of a sportsman, and soon arranged all the preliminary details.

We were up early next morning, and while the old man went off to cut the poles and grass, etc., required for the construction of the hut, we collected the commissariat, bedding, rifles, ammunition, etc., and reduced them to portable dimensions for loading on the elephants.

These preparations occupied some time, but were all completed by the evening, and at daybreak, next day, we started for the forest, one elephant carrying the materials for the hut and the rest of our belongings, plus the "kitchen," to wit, an oil-stove, one saucepan and a kettle.

On the other were ourselves and our shikari, valet, cook and butler as represented in the person of Dhundhos.

The " site " we had selected for our hut was a tree we knew of in the heart of the forest, about eight miles from our camp, and after the first mile or two the path we had been following led into a sea of thick, reed-grass some twenty feet in height, and offering such resistance that the elephants could hardly make their way.

For here there was neither path nor track, and as the animals crashed through we wondered how their drivers could keep the right direction. Indeed they were occasionally at fault, and but for the old man's marvellous knowledge of forest navigation must soon have lost their way. The grass seemed to grow higher and more dense with every step we took, till the elephants were forced to bore their way through it, leaving a path behind them of tunnel-like formation, most curious to look back on; but as we proceeded further, we met with several similar tunnels, made by wild elephants, and, presently, found ourselves in one running in the direction we were going.

This, from its size and smooth interior, we concluded was one made by a "herd," for wild elephants, when moving in large bodies, generally walk in single file, each stepping in the footsteps of the other, with military precision. We continued along this channel for some distance making more rapid progress, and finally, leaving the grass behind us, entered the tree jungle.

About five hours later, after forcing our way through a mass of trees, dense undergrowth, and creepers, we reached our destination, and dismounting, soon found the tree we were in search of growing on the margin of a pool.

It was a monster of its kind, and exactly suited for our purpose, its huge spreading branches affording a basis for the flooring of the hut, while the lighter boughs, some six feet higher up, would serve the purpose of a roof.

However, as the platform was, obviously, the first consideration, we set to work on it at once. Taking the stoutest poles we had brought, we lashed them, at intervals, transversely to the branches, crossing these again with others of lighter make till we had made a kind of grating,

strong enough to bear us, about eight feet by eight in size and twenty feet from the ground.

The substructure being completed, we now turned our attention to the roofing, which, in comparison with the other, we found quite an easy job. For the foliage overhead was already almost thick enough to protect us from the dew, and a little rearrangement and the addition of some grass, etc., made it quite impervious.

The "house" being now ready for occupation, we unloaded the elephants and sent them back to camp, instructing their mahouts to return for us on the third day from that date—thus cutting ourselves off from all communication with the world, for should anything prevent the elephants returning we would be as completely stranded as if in mid ocean on a rock !

But such a possible calamity, so far from troubling us, merely added to the charm of the situation as, perched on our airy shelter, we sat listening to the animals, crashing through the jungle homeward bound.

Meanwhile the indefatigable Dhundhos was busily employed preparing a shelter for himself, on the other side of the tree, where he could eat, and enjoy what little sleep he was likely to obtain. It was a curious structure when completed, and, as a place to sleep in, looked perilously insecure, but the old man, accustomed to passing his nights on tree-tops, seemed perfectly content.

His next job was the " kitchen," which he made on the same principle as our platform, but considerably smaller ; then going down to the pool he prepared a mass of mud and water, with which he smeared the surface to make it fireproof and, placing the oil-stove in it, set to work upon our dinner. We had decided to dine early, being hungry after our long journey, besides we were anxious to avoid using artificial light, fearing it might scare away the tiger, or any other beast, coming to the pool to drink.

Accordingly, as soon as the meal was over, we commenced our preparations for the night by piling up a heap of grass on each side of the platform ; on these we spread our blankets, while Dhundhos, who had thoughtfully brought two pillow slips, filled these tightly with leaves.

In the meantime, what little light we had throughout

the day was rapidly diminishing, and soon, while still an hour from sunset, we were surrounded by a darkness as of night, for though the sun was doubtless yet visible outside it could not penetrate the trees and foliage between us and its rays.

However, we knew the moon would soon be rising, and by midnight should be high enough to light up the margin of the pool; hence, any animal coming there to drink should be plainly visible, unless immediately below us.

It was a fascinating prospect from the sportsman's point of view, and as we lay back on our grass couches we resolved to keep awake all night rather than run the risk of losing any item in the programme our fancy had made out.

We kept to our resolution for a time, struggling manfully against our drowsy inclinations, but there were too many sleep-inducing influences at work. The soft, comfortable beds, added to the dark and death-like stillness of the night, were powerful narcotics which, acting on minds and bodies already wearied with exertion, finally took effect, and we were both soon fast asleep.

How long we had slept I cannot say, but presently I was awakened by a grip upon the shoulder, while a voice, which I recognized as Dhundhos', whispered in my ear: "Don't move or speak, sahib, there is something stirring underneath; listen!" As he spoke I heard a rustling in the jungle below our platform.

Raising myself cautiously, I sat listening for a while. Soon the rustling ceased, and was succeeded by a low, purring kind of sound, suggestive of some animal of the cat tribe, but whether a tiger or a leopard was more than I could tell.

But Dhundhos knew the difference, for many were the nights he had heard such sounds, and seen the beasts that made them prowling round his lonely watch posts, and before I had time to question him, he whispered, "It is a bagh (tiger), sahib, coming to the pool to drink."

Presently the rustling recommenced, and a moment or two later we heard the beast step into the water, which it commenced lapping, eagerly, as if suffering from great thirst. Finally with a grunt of evident satisfaction it came

back to the tree and seemed to rear itself against it, for we could hear—and feel—the grating of its claws upon the bark!

This continued for some time—the brute purring loudly all the while—then suddenly, as if something had alarmed it, it dropped back to the ground, and with a loud booming roar, bounded off into the forest.

I now crawled across the platform, and rousing my companion, who had been sleeping peacefully through it all, we sat on in anxious expectation, hoping to hear the beast return, for the moon was now rising, and soon there should be light enough to see it, and possibly to obtain a shot.

An hour or two went by, but, except for an occasional stirring of the jungle in the distance, there were no sounds of any animal moving near the pool. But as the night drew on the forest seemed awakening into life. The sounds we had heard before gradually grew louder, and there was a sense of movement all around us.

Presently the jungle facing us was violently agitated, and a bear of the ordinary black species came waddling into view. Like all his kind, he was an unkempt, untidy-looking beast, with bandy legs and of a fussy, inquisitive disposition, stopping every second to examine something in his path.

Finally, reaching the water's edge, he sat up on his haunches and, with a most comical expression on his face, appeared to be wondering how he had got there! Then, for no apparent reason, seemed suddenly to lose his temper, giving expression to his feelings in loud, sharp snorts of disapproval. The next moment he had recovered and was down on all fours again, grubbing about the ground as if searching for something he had lost, his movements being so ridiculously human that it was as much as we could do to keep from laughing out.

He now commenced to dig beneath some roots, and extracting a spongy-looking mass, divided it with his claws, and selecting certain portions, devoured them with evident approval; for it was a nest of white ants he had found—a dish much esteemed by Indian bears.

Picking out the daintiest morsels more carefully as his

appetite diminished, he was still busy with his meal, when a loud, shrill blast, as of a bugle, came pealing through the forest, which sent him scuttling off into the jungle, a good deal faster than he had come.

The sound was repeated several times, accompanied by a tremendous commotion in the forest to our right, and soon a huge elephant, followed by several others, marched slowly past our front, breaking down branches and uprooting the smaller trees as they went crashing through the forest, making as much progress in one hour as we had done the previous day in six!

Meanwhile the dawn had broken, and, as the elephants passed out of hearing, we went down to the pool, and while Dhundhos prepared our breakfast, indulged in a good wash. The rest of that day was mostly passed in sleep, for we intended sitting up again that night watching for the tiger.

Accordingly, as soon as it was dark again, we took up our positions, and for three long, weary hours sat on in total darkness till at last the moon, rising above the trees, lit up the pool, and none too soon, for a minute or two later the same low purring sound I had heard the night before, came suddenly from our right, and evidently quite near. The next moment, the jungle slowly parted, disclosing to our view the head and shoulders of the tiger! Pausing for an instant, he advanced towards the water, but slowly and very cautiously, with his eyes fixed on the ground, apparently as yet unconscious of our presence.

But we had covered him with our rifles the moment he appeared, and as he reached the bit of open between the jungle and the water, we fired together, both aiming for the shoulder.

We could hardly have missed him at the distance, nevertheless, with a roar, appalling in its volume and ferocity, he sprang towards the flash. We fired again, but without any visible effect, and before we could reload he had plunged back into the jungle.

We heard him there, roaring and struggling for some time, apparently hard hit, and could see the jungle moving where he lay, for he had fallen close to where he entered, and was now, evidently, struggling to get up.

We fired several shots into the jungle, till at last one seemed to take effect, for suddenly the beast stopped roaring ; its struggles, too, gradually grew feebler, and then, with one loud, long-drawn moan, all sound and movement ceased.

We felt sure the beast was dead ; but were not disposed to verify the fact by closer observation at that hour of the night. So, after firing another shot or two, without eliciting any reply, we turned in, anxious to obtain a few hours' sleep.

Morning was well advanced when we awoke, and our courage returning with the day, we determined to investigate the jungle. We were in the act of descending for this purpose, when Dhundhos, who was already half-way down, stopped suddenly and, listening for awhile, signed to us to go back.

" The elephants are returning, sahib," he said, as he rejoined us ; and presently we heard, in the far distance, the sounds of some large animals approaching.

Nearer and nearer they came till they had almost reached the spot, where we thought the tiger lay, when suddenly they halted, and the next moment, with loud trumpetings and squeals, went dashing headlong through the forest in the opposite direction.

But above the uproar they created, we had distinguished the sound of human voices, and recognized them as those of our mahouts ! It was our own elephants then which Dhundhos had mistaken for wild ones, and we concluded they must have come suddenly on the body of the tiger. But the question now arose as to whether their mahouts would be able to induce them to return ? However, after much shouting and abusive language they succeeded, and as the animals seemed now to have recovered from their panic, we mounted one of them, and with Dhundhos on the other, advanced cautiously into the jungle.

But we had hardly entered it when they again exhibited symptoms of uneasiness. However, patted and encouraged by their drivers, they moved slowly forward, pushing the jungle carefully with their trunks at every step they took.

Proceeding in this manner for another twenty yards,

with our rifles held ready for instant use, we finally came upon the tiger, stretched out at full length and unmistakably dead. But even in death he looked a most formidable beast, and when we came to measure him taped over 10 feet 2 inches! There were three bullet holes in the body, two close together, about ten inches behind the shoulder, and the other, evidently the last, just below one ear.

We skinned the carcass where it lay, for we found that the five of us together could hardly lift it off the ground, much less on to the elephant; a task which, for a tiger of that size, would have needed more than twice our number.

We next cut off the head and, extracting the two "Lucky Bones," embedded in the flesh around the shoulders, collected our belongings and started back for camp. The hut we left standing, intending to make use of it as a "hunting-box" in future.

Thus ended our "week-end" in the forest, as enjoyable an experience as any sportsman could desire, provided he be gifted with patience and endurance, and is not too fastidious as to his meals, or the mode in which they are served!

CHAPTER VIII

THE success which had attended my first attempt to shoot a tiger from a tree, as described, plus the accompanying fascination of the days and nights spent in the heart of the forest, had whetted my appetite for this form of sport. Hence when, some three months later, my duties necessitated a sojourn of some days in a distant rest-house situated in the midst of a dense jungle, I looked forward to relieving the monotony of my solitary existence by devoting my leisure moments to further experiments in this mode of sport.

My late experience had, however, shown me that of all the methods employed by the Anglo-Indian sportsman in hunting the large carnivora, there are few that test his qualities so thoroughly as this one.

In the first place, to be successful the vigil should be a lonely one, for absolute silence being necessarily the most important element of the business, it is wiser to reduce the chances of a cough or sneeze or any similar indiscretion to the capacity of one individual only. Another and most essential quality is patience, without which it would be useless to attempt this kind of sport, and this brings me to my adventure, for from it will be seen to what extent one's patience may be tried.

I had been about three days in the bungalow when the panther I am about to tell of made his first appearance on the scene. When I say "made his appearance," I do not mean to imply that I saw him then. For that was a pleasure I was not destined to enjoy till the moment that I shot him—six days later on.

But although during this period he was not visible to the eye, he had made his presence known, and sometimes felt too, in various aggravating ways, not the least unpleasant of which was the music with which he favoured me at nights.

The first time that I heard him was about twelve o'clock one night when all the servants were asleep, and the bungalow, and everything around it, as silent as the tomb. Tired with a long day's work, I had been sleeping soundly for some time when I was aroused by the most awful, blood-curdling sounds I had ever heard—a sound beyond my ability to describe, and one which I can only liken to that produced by a person sawing wood.

I started up in bed and sat listening for a while, and wondering why the carpenters should be working at that hour of the night. But the noise growing louder every moment, and seeming to come nearer, I realized it emanated from some animal, and called loudly to my "boy."

He too had evidently heard it, for emerging from his "den," in the back verandah, he came running in immediately, and rushing to the door, which I had left open, shut and bolted it at once.

"Master get it gun quick!" he cried excitedly. "That one. Panter wanting master's dog." And running into the next room, bolted that door too.

It was fortunate he did so, for my terrier, a plucky and aggressive little beast, was now barking furiously, and in another moment would probably have rushed out into the darkness.

In the meantime the panther was apparently prowling round the bungalow, seemingly close up against the wall, which being of matting only, we could hear him as distinctly as if he was actually within the house. I went up to the window with my gun, but the night was so intensely dark that I found it impossible to locate him, and was afraid to fire till I could do so, as there were servants' huts all round. Finally, he departed, grunting as he went off with rage and disappointment.

The next night he visited us again, and for the whole of this week, at intervals of a day or two, he came prowling round the bungalow till I came to regard him as a part of my existence; but, unfortunately, grew careless about my dog.

Meanwhile, acting on the advice of my "factotum," in other words, "the boy"—who, by the way, was a "youth"

verging on sixty years of age !—I constructed a " machan " (platform) upon a tree, and tying up a village cur beneath it, sat for many a weary hour upon it, hoping for a shot.

But the beast was far too cunning, and though he occasionally carried off a cur, it was always before I had arrived, or when the night was at its darkest and shooting with any effect practically impossible.

Finally, after a succession of sleepless nights passed on the " machan," I gave up the attempt, and was sitting one evening, smoking in the verandah, when I heard a slight rustling in a bush, just beyond the steps.

My terrier, who had been lying at my feet, started up at once and, barking loudly, rushed headlong down the steps before I had time to stop him ; the next moment there was a short, hoarse roar, followed by a yelp, as a long, low animal dashed past me with the terrier in its mouth !

I followed immediately, shouting as I ran, but the beast disappeared into some grass, and, bounding through it at full gallop, was soon out of sight and sound, leaving me in a frame of mine easily to be imagined.

The next morning I held a consultation with the " boy " and a semi-savage specimen of humanity, one of the coolies on the garden, who posed as a " shikari," and it was decided that a calf should be purchased and chained up in the particular jungle frequented by the beast.

This was accordingly done, but two nights passed without result. On the third evening, however, while I was at dinner I heard the calf bellowing, and thinking the panther was about, I waited to let him kill.

Three or four hours later, as I was going to bed, there was a terrible commotion in the jungle as of a struggle taking place, then a faint bellow, ending in a moan, followed by perfect silence for a while, and then a low purring kind of sound, which continued for about an hour. Too excited to sleep, I passed a restless night, and the day had hardly broken when I was up and on my way to the jungle, which was about three hundred yards from the bungalow.

On arrival I found the calf lying dead, with its neck broken, and half the body eaten. The panther had evidently tried to drag away the carcass, but the chain

had been too much for him, so he had made his meal upon the spot. He had apparently just moved off on hearing me approach, as I had heard the jungle rustling as I came up. I had a " machan " hastily constructed on the nearest tree that I could find, and posting a man on it to prevent the " kill " being taken by the coolies, went off to my work.

I returned about 6 P.M. with my rifle, and sending the man away, climbed up into his place, determined, if necessary, to stay there all night, for I was sure the beast would come back to the " kill," and as the moon would be up later on, I had every prospect of a shot.

I had sat watching for about half an hour, when a couple of pigeons started up suddenly from the grass in front of me, evidently alarmed by something they had seen or heard, and immediately afterwards I fancied I could hear a slight movement in the jungle to my left. I looked in the direction from whence the sound proceeded, but could see nothing for a time, though I could still hear the rustling in the jungle as of some animal creeping stealthily through it.

I felt sure it was the panther, and I was right, for a moment or two later I caught a glimpse of something yellow, gliding swiftly through the jungle.

There was a small bit of open lying directly in its path, and, thinking to get a shot there, I waited till it should reach it. It was a mere gap, scarcely three feet wide, and so quickly and silently did the beast approach it that he was almost through before I had time to cock the rifle.

Fortunately, in the excitement of the moment I raised the hammer quickly, omitting to ease the springs, and at the click of the lock the animal stopped suddenly, leaving its hind-quarters still exposed to view.

My rifle was already at the shoulder, and, swinging the muzzle forward, I fired, hoping to get him through the lungs. I knew that I had hit him, for he turned at the shot, and, with a roar of agony or rage, attempted to come at me. I now gave him the left barrel, on which he plunged back into the jungle, where I could hear him roaring and tumbling about with the tip of his tail waving in the air. This commotion continued for some time, for I heard him

moving through the jungle, and from the sounds becoming fainter every moment, I judged he was going off.

No sooner had I come to this conclusion than I descended from my perch, and, in blissful ignorance of the danger I incurred, was about to follow in his track. But it was now too dark to see them, and I was compelled, fortunately, to abandon the attempt, for it would, in all probability, have ended more disastrously to myself than to the beast I was intending to pursue !

In fact, as I look back upon this incident in the light of subsequent experience, I can hardly believe it possible that I could ever have contemplated anything so absolutely idiotic as following a wounded panther in that light ! However, I was much disgusted at the time, and groped my way back to the bungalow, grumbling at what I then considered my bad luck !

I returned early the next morning, and, hitting off the trail at once, had hardly followed it twenty yards when I came upon the panther lying stretched out in a glade, and dead as Julius Cæsar. I was naturally much pleased, for this was the first large leopard I had " bagged ; " but my joy was as nothing compared to my " boy's," who fairly danced with delight.

The beast had given him many a sleepless night, often coming on to the verandah where he slept, and had once even tried to get into his " den " ; beside, he had never forgiven him for taking off my dog, to which he was specially devoted.

He was carrying my camera, and suggested that I should " Make it picture of the beast," which I did, taking him as he lay. We then measured him with the tape, and found he was exactly seven feet two inches, but had probably shrunk an inch or two in death.

Some coolies had followed us, so, cutting a long pole, we tied the legs of the brute together and carried him off in triumph to the bungalow, where " I made picture of him again " with " the boy " as one of its " supporters."

CHAPTER IX

THE next leopard that came into my life—though, unfortunately, only incidentally—was a very different animal, both as to size and character, and, I may add, in tastes, for it eventually developed into the most confirmed man-eater of any leopard ever known, or even heard of, in Bengal. Its ravages at one time were so frequently committed in the villages lying on the border of my district that I made one or two attempts to destroy the beast myself, but without success.

For human beings to be killed by tigers, and occasionally by leopards, was a common enough occurrence in those days; but it is doubtful whether the most notorious of man-eating animals that has yet been heard of in any part of India, ever exercised such terrorism in the neighbourhood it frequented as the one whose criminal history is now to be recorded, and whose depredations against the human race, extending over a period of twenty months, created a panic, seldom equalled, and certainly never yet surpassed. In some cases whole families were destroyed, while there was scarcely a single household that had not supplied at least one victim to this monster's murderous rapacity.

The animal had taken up its abode in the jungle around a group of villages of which one L—— was the chief and centre. This record of its unprecedented ferocity and subsequent death is compiled from the notes of a friend, an official of the district in which these massacres took place, and who formed one of the party of sportsmen by whom they were avenged.

The district in question was contiguous to the one in which I was posted at the time, and I well remember the terror established in the neighbourhood by the appalling number of persons killed and eaten monthly by the savage

brute. The leopard, which eventually came to be known as the "L—— Man-Eater," had had a long and uninterrupted career of crime. So far as could be ascertained, its first human victim was a girl of four years of age, who was carried off one evening, while at play in the courtyard of the house!

Many shooting parties had been organized, by both European and native gentlemen alike, for the destruction of this pest, but without success, for whenever hunted, it sought refuge in one of the many sugar-cane crops, which for eleven months of the year are rich and abundant. These crops not only afforded the best possible cover for the hunted animal, but, being of considerable value, a line of elephants could not be taken through them without causing serious damage to the owners.

The leopard first manifested its man-eating propensities when it carried off and ate the girl already mentioned. Later on in the same month it killed a boy of eight, and devoured an infant of one and a-half years. The next human victim was a child killed a month later.

From the January to end of December in that year it had killed and wholly or partially devoured exactly one hundred persons, mostly women and children, and in the following year, up to the following April, when it was shot, it had accounted for fifty-four more. This making a total of one hundred and fifty-four persons killed within a space of twenty-one months!

The terror created by such a wholesale slaughter of human beings in one particular group of villages may be more easily imagined than described. The people were fairly panic-stricken. Some fled and sought refuge in distant villages, others, abandoning all thoughts of sleep, barricaded their doors and windows and kept on the watch all night, while some of the younger and able-bodied men, goaded to desperation by the loss of wife, child, or other near relative, lay in wait for this demon in feline form, and when it next made its onslaught, attacked it in a body, armed with sticks and stones, but only to lose some of their own number. For the bloodthirsty brute, encouraged by former successes, and wholly devoid of fear, charged boldly into the crowd, sometimes killing one

or two, and always mauling others before making its escape, which it invariably did, practically uninjured.

By the time the monster had killed some eighty women and children, the villagers were thoroughly cowed and paralysed with fear, glancing round suspiciously when discussing the animal, whom they had now come to regard as a veritable demon, against whom it was idle to contend, and speaking with bated breath, as if afraid it might overhear them and take revenge.

In the meanwhile the dread beast continued its ravages unmolested, and in due course of time had added another seventy-four persons to its already long list of victims. Emboldened by its further successes and encouraged by the impunity with which it could seize and devour its prey, it no longer confined its attention to women and children, but had now taken to attacking men also.

Its movements, too, were so rapid that it was impossible to say when it might not appear. For instance, one afternoon at 6 P.M. it killed a woman in a hamlet four miles to the south of the main village ; the very next afternoon it killed and devoured a boy at a place five miles to the east ; and again the next evening attacked and so severely mauled a man that he died soon after in a village four miles to the north-east ! On twelve occasions it killed two people in one day, and three times, as many as three per day. Except in the first year of its murderous career, seventeen days was the longest interval it allowed to pass without killing some one.

Of the total one hundred and fifty-four persons that it destroyed, it wholly or partially devoured seventy-two. Of the remaining eighty-two, in some cases it left the bodies untouched, whilst in four others it was driven off before it had time to commence its meal ; these being cases in which it was seen to kill, and was followed up by large crowds of yelling villagers.

The above figures need little comment, and it is small wonder that the people, timid and superstitious as the agricultural class of Bengal generally are, should have become thoroughly demoralized and imbued with the belief that the destroyer was no ordinary animal, but some supernatural monster of Satanic origin, specially sent for

their destruction. Indeed, a similar visitation, were such possible, would, even in civilized Europe, be likely to create equal consternation, and be calculated to arouse superstitious belief of a somewhat similar nature. Be that as it may, the situation had now assumed a most alarming and terrible aspect.

One hundred and fifty-four human beings had already fallen victims to the monster's insatiable lust for human flesh, and it was evident that unless some preventive measures were soon adopted, the villages affected would speedily be depopulated.

Public feeling was strong, the subject was taken up by the Press and discussed in a manner not altogether complimentary to the local authorities, nor were the people themselves sparing in their insinuations. But, as a matter of fact, the responsible district officials, while fully alive to the necessity of putting an end to this horrible scourge, were practically powerless.

They had made every endeavour possible to locate and destroy the brute, and all recognized and many hitherto unknown methods for the destruction of the " Man-Eater " had been adopted, but without success. The only plan left untried was the poisoning of the kills, which under ordinary circumstances would in all probability have proved successful.

This otherwise unsportsmanlike manner of destroying dangerous game, would in the present instance have been pardonable and gladly resorted to, so desperate had the situation become. Unfortunately, one of this wily monster's peculiarities was that it never returned to its kill after making the first meal off it, a practice, while entirely opposed to all recognized and well-established theories as to the habits common to all animals of the cat tribe, which secured for it an absolute immunity from any such attempts at its destruction.

The hundreds upon hundreds of acres of dense sugar cane crops which covered the face of the country was another serious obstacle to the location of so active and cunning an animal, and one taken full advantage of by the shrewd beast.

Frequent consultations had been held by the officials

and other Europeans and native gentlemen of the district, and the situation fully discussed.

Finally, at the suggestion of the gentleman to whose notes this narrative is due, a shooting party, on the largest possible scale, was arranged for, early in the month of April, a time when all the sugar cane crops would be cut down and only the natural jungle left.

The party were to be in readiness on the first day of the month, and would be summoned to meet at the village where the first kill should occur after that date, and beat up all the jungle in its neighbourhood. They had not long to wait, for on the 2nd of April came a report that a boy of twelve had been killed and eaten in the village of A——, some six miles north of L——.

By the 4th inst., all the members of the party, accompanied by some twenty elephants, had assembled at this place, and early on the morning of the 5th, proceeded to beat up all the jungle round about, but without success.

On the morning of the 6th, no more news of any recent kill having been received, the jungles around some neighbouring village were tried, and about ten o'clock, while the beat was still proceeding, an old man came running up with the news that he had just seen the " Man-Eater " in the branches of a large tamarind tree in his village, and had watched it for some time, finally seeing it descend and enter a cane-brake at the foot of the tree he had come to give information.

The old man's statement was not considered very credible, but as his village was only a mile off, it was thought advisable to go there and test the truth of the story. On the way to the village the old man informed the sportsman that his own wife had been carried off by the Man-Eater a month or two ago, while carrying home a water-pot filled from an adjacent pond.

That this part of the country was a favourite haunt of the Man-Eater was evident from the number of deserted homesteads from which the owners had fled, owing to some member of the family being carried off.

When the party reached the village, the old man pointed to a depression of the ground under the tamarind tree, covered with a thorny growth, as the place where the leopard

lay concealed, and opposite which was another deserted homestead where the Man-Eater had once killed. Subsequently several deserted houses were found in the village, which covered a considerable area, also the potsherds, near the place where the old man's wife was killed.

The elephants were now put into the cane jungle, the howdahs with the guns accompanying the line, the patch of cover being too small to necessitate their being posted. It was indeed an anxious moment. Most, if not all, the sportsmen present had been out, time without number, during the past twenty months in the hope of encountering and putting an end to this ruthless slayer of women and children.

They had toiled for many a livelong day, in broiling heat and drenching rain, only to return to camp, again and again, hopeless and dejected, and with the knowledge, born of past experience, that even while they were hunting for it, it was probably adding other victims to its score several miles away !

But now everything seemed to point to success, and all conditions favourable. The crops were down, and the animal, it was alleged, had actually just been seen to enter this very jungle where it could not have escaped without showing itself. No fresh kill had been reported since the one they were now concerned with. Hope was therefore strong in the breast of every sportsman there, each praying that his might be the lucky shot that would rid the country of this terrible scourge, and restore peace and security to a people now well-nigh maddened with terror and despair.

The line beating close and carefully had nearly reached the end of the cover, when suddenly a leopard jumped up from almost under the feet of one of the howdah elephants, and was immediately fired at, but broke back. The line was quickly wheeled round and surrounded the spot where it was last seen, and as the elephants converged towards the centre, the animal appeared again, receiving another salute from the same howdah, which apparently took effect, for it acknowledged it with a growl of disapproval as it rushed through one side of the circle and on to the further end of the cover.

The whole line now started in pursuit, so closely packed that no animal could evade it, and soon came up to it lying, badly hit, in a thick patch of cane out of which they tried in vain to drive it.

Finally, a big tusker elephant was sent in alone, and as it approached the spot where the leopard lay, the latter reared its body up for an instant as if to attack its formidable foe. This so aggravated the huge, but usually good-tempered old tusker, that, rushing quickly forward, it attempted to pound it with its feet; but the leopard, though evidently sorely hurt, retained sufficient activity to avoid the crushing blows, and, after a short scrimmage, wriggled itself along, and, crawling a yard or two away, crouched down in full view of the howdahs.

The sportsmen, unable to use their rifles during the tussle, now eagerly seizing this opportunity, fired a volley into the crouching brute, and so ended its murderous and infamous career. Thus died, at last, the terrible Man-Eater, meeting with a death far more honourable than its blood-stained life had merited, and one wholly immeasurable with the many lives he had taken, some of them, in the mere wantonness of its cruel nature.

The delight of the sportsmen at having at last achieved what they had so long and arduously striven for in vain, may well be imagined, though at the time it was somewhat marred by a doubt as to whether the animal slain was the real Man-Eater or not, a doubt which, in spite of the emphatic asseverations of the now assembled and jubilant villagers, was natural enough considering the number of leopards in the locality, and the marvellous mobility possessed by the one in question.

The carcass was carefully measured, and proved to be in all respects that of an ordinary male leopard of six feet six inches, and, except for an abnormally large head, and immensely powerful shoulders, somewhat below the average in weight and bulk. The skin was not in the least degree mangy, as is, erroneously, believed to be generally the case with man-eaters, and, when cured, was seven feet nine inches in length, and very handsomely marked.

To clear up all doubt as to the identity of the animal,

the party remained encamped in the locality for several days, but no further kill of human beings was reported from any of the villages, whereas, during the preceding three months they had been of almost daily occurrence, thus proving conclusively that the leopard killed was in truth the dreaded Man-Eater !

CHAPTER X

THE somewhat gruesome series of incidents just recorded recall to my mind, possibly because of its contrast, a distinctly more amusing episode in which a leopard also played the most important part, and as this incident occurred shortly after I had heard of the Man-Eater's performances, I recall it here in the hope that it may serve as an antidote, if nothing else, to the harrowing story which precedes it.

This extraordinary and somewhat comical adventure occurred in an out-of-the-way district of Bengal—one of the very few which still retain some traces of their primitive condition, despite the vandalism of the present age.

In the remotest corner of this district, perched on the summit of one of the many hills that stand like sentinels on its border, is a military station, which at the time was garrisoned by the —th Native Infantry. Amongst the sporting officers of this very sporting regiment there was none keener than its doctor, a young Scotchman, who, having more leisure than the others, devoted most of it to sport.

He had spent many a long day roaming amongst the hills, but without any success; then resorted to sitting up at nights, watching over "kills." Unfortunately, the animals he awaited were evidently watching too, for so long as he was awake none approached the kill. Yet often the next morning he found it dragged away. However, he continued these nightly vigils till a sharp attack of fever, due to the exposure, nearly ended his career. He was laid up for a month, and during this period of enforced idleness conceived the brilliant scheme which led to this adventure.

A day or two after his recovery the news of a recent "kill" gave him the opportunity of testing the new plan.

So, taking his rifle, a blanket, and a coil of rope, he started for the place, arriving there at sundown.

The " kill," a good sized calf, lay in a small clearing in the midst of a dense jungle, and near to it was fortunately a tree on which the doctor, despite his past experience, resolved to pass the night. But before taking up his position, he fastened one end of the rope to the hind legs of the carcass, and, threading the other carefully through some bushes, took it up with him into the tree. Then, having ensconced himself as comfortably as circumstances would admit of, he knotted the rope's end to his waist-belt, and, with the rifle across his knees, commenced his lonely watch.

Darkness had set in by the time his preparations were completed, but he knew the moon was due at midnight, and that it was unlikely he would need her aid before; besides, he felt quite sure the alarum he had arranged would warn him, should any attempt be made to move the " kill."

He had resolved to keep awake, and for a time he was successful, but the inky blackness of the night, added to the absence of all sound, were powerful narcotics, and yielding gradually to their influence, he soon dropped off to sleep. He had slept, how long he could not say, when suddenly a violent pull at the rope nearly jerked him off his perch. He woke up with a start only just in time to save his rifle falling through the branches.

There was a moment's pause, and then a sound of something moving in the jungle. The doctor, now thoroughly awake, placed the rifle between his knees, and, gripping the rope with both his hands, awaited further developments. Presently he felt another strain upon the rope, accompanied by a low, snarling kind of growl, and, the next moment, found himself measuring his strength with some unknown and powerful opponent in a regular tug-of-war.

The strange contest continued for some time, neither side willing to relinquish the object in dispute; but soon the rising moon, hitherto concealed behind the trees, shed her light upon the scene, revealing to the sportsman the peril he was in. For there, scarce twenty paces from him,

was a leopard which, with its forefeet planted firmly on the ground, was dragging savagely at the " kill " which it held between its jaws.

It was a ludicrous position, but withal a very dangerous one, since leopards can climb trees as easily as cats, and the doctor, quick to realize the danger, took immediate action. Keeping his left hand on the rope, he picked up the rifle with his right, and, cocking it in silence, whistled loudly. The leopard dropped the " kill " at once, and, with head upraised, stood listening, evidently trying to locate the sound.

The next moment two reports, in quick succession, broke the stillness of the night, and with one loud, gurgling roar of agony and rage, the stricken beast sprang towards the flash. The impetus of its rush, took it close up to the tree, but only to die beneath it, for the two explosive bullets had done their deadly work, and the doctor's little scheme had ended in success.

But, as may be imagined, the hunting of such dangerous game by night, although a most fascinating pursuit, is often a very perilous amusement, more especially if the hunter is not provided with an elephant to take him home through the jungle, should he wish to leave his post before daylight.

A young planter friend of mine, for example, had a perilous experience. G——, the individual in question, being employed on a tea garden in a remote corner of the district, surrounded by dense jungle, had—more or less of necessity—taken to big game shooting, and in the two years he had been there, had shot almost every kind of animal in these jungles with the exception of a tiger. His failure to obtain the last, however, was not due to any want of trying. On the contrary, he had tied up old bullocks by the score, and had sat up for many a weary hour over such as had been killed. But it had all proved labour lost, for a tiger never came—or, if it did, always after he had left.

At length, having expended half the ancient cattle in the neighbourhood as well as most of his stock of patience, he resolved to try once more, and if this failed, to give up the attempt.

A month or two went by, and the tigers, as is their wont, seemed to have abandoned that locality for a while. However, one morning, after a night of heavy rain, a coolie passing by a jungle, discovered some fresh pugs. Another venerable bullock was accordingly procured and tied up in that jungle after sunset near a good-sized tree.

The luckless beast was killed that night, but little of it eaten, and early the next evening G——, full of energy and hope, took up his position on the tree, from whence the "kill" was visible about twenty yards away. There was still an hour or two of daylight left, and as the place was very solitary and quiet, he hoped the tiger might put in an appearance before the night set in.

For two long, weary hours he kept his lonely vigil, and the light was now fast fading. Then suddenly there came a rustling in the jungle, immediately behind him, as of some animal cautiously approaching, and about ten minutes later he heard it pass close under him.

It was now too dark to distinguish objects clearly, but presently he made out a shadowy shape stealing towards the "kill." He knew instinctively it must be the tiger, and, raising his rifle carefully, fired at what he judged to be its shoulder.

Whether the beast was hit or not it was impossible to tell; but at the unfamiliar sound breaking so suddenly upon its ears, it sprang high into the air, and, with a loud "Wough!" of terror or surprise, bounded off into the jungle.

Half an hour later, his "shikari" and some coolies arriving with a lantern, G—— descended from his perch and examined the spot where the tiger had been when he fired, hoping to find some blood. There was none, but a foot beyond this spot and in the line of fire, he found his bullet embedded in a stump, in front of which the animal was passing at the time. An inch lower and the bullet must have crashed through its shoulder!

It was tantalizing for the sportsman to find how nearly he had succeeded. However, he was now assured that tigers do sometimes come back to their "kills"—a fact his past experience had led him to discredit—and he was now keener than ever to carry on the war.

A month or two again elapsed, and, but for an occasional vague rumour, there had been no evidence of any tigers in the neighbourhood, when one day the "muduvan" (shikari), wandering around the jungles, came suddenly upon the pugs of three—evidently those of a tigress and two seemingly full-grown cubs.

This time G—— decided on building a "machan" (platform), which was accordingly erected on a strip of grass land bordered on each side by heavy jungle, and—old bullocks now being scarce—a cow was requisitioned and tethered by a piece of wire, about twenty yards from the machan.

Early next morning the shikari, going to see how the cow had fared, found her lying dead and partly eaten, and, on mounting the "machan" to make sure it was secure, saw to his amazement the tigress and her cubs playing in the open, about a quarter of a mile away. He descended a good deal quicker than he had gone up, and, returning to his master, reported what he had seen, adding with a native's talent for embroidery, a good deal that he hadn't as to the size and ferocious appearance of the animals, etc., etc.

G——'s delight at hearing this good news may be easily imagined, and, disposing of his work as quickly as he could, he returned with the "shikari." Arriving on the spot about two in the afternoon, they found the "kill" still there, but the tigers had evidently come back after the shikari left, for more of it had been eaten.

This was not encouraging, as they might not now return to it till late into the night. However, G——, too keen to be easily put off, mounted the machan, and telling the "shikari" to wait outside the jungle, resolved to watch as long as there was light.

It was another weary vigil, varied on this occasion by frequent showers of rain, which soaked him to the skin; yet, with dogged perseverance, he sat on, shivering, but still hopeful. At last he thought he was about to be rewarded, as suddenly, above the noisy patter of the rain—now descending in a deluge—he heard one of the tigers calling in the jungle on his right. The sounds continuing for some time, gradually drew nearer, then ceased as suddenly as they

had risen, and, after a long interval of silence, were heard again, but now in the far distance, finally dying away as the beast retired further into the jungle.

One with more knowledge and experience of tigers and their ways would now have probably given up all hope; but—as the old proverb tells us—there are times when "'Tis folly to be wise," and G——, being possibly of this opinion, adhered to his resolve to watch so long as he could see. At length, finding that night was rapidly approaching, and the rain, which had cleared off for a while, was now setting in again, he decided to start homewards before it was quite dark.

Rising with this intention, he had already placed one foot on the top rung of the ladder when he thought he saw a movement in the grass beyond the "kill." He paused for a moment to make sure, and the next instant was back in the machan—crouching behind the screen of leaves. And none too soon!—for scarcely a moment later the head and shoulders of a tiger appeared above the grass!

The beast came boldly on till it reached the clearing near the "kill," then stopped suddenly, and, looking up at the "machan," seemed to scent some danger there. It was standing broadside on, hardly thirty paces off, presenting as fine a target as the sportsman could desire.

Meanwhile the latter, trembling with excitement and with the barrel of his rifle protruded through the leaves, was vainly trying to hold the weapon steady. At last he succeeded, and drawing a bead upon the shoulder so temptingly displayed, gently pressed the trigger.

As the report went ringing through the jungle, the stricken beast reared itself on end, and with a short, half-stifled roar of agony and rage, fell forward into the grass, and struggling there a while, finally rolled out of sight. In the meantime G—— had fired his second barrel as the brute lay struggling in the grass, but without any visible effect, and waiting to give time for the animal to die, or crawl to a safe distance, he got down, intending to make the best of his way home.

It was now almost dark, and as his route lay through the grass, along the very path by which the tiger had

approached, there was every probability of his encountering one or both the others on his way. However, there was no alternative short of spending the night in the "machan," so reloading his rifle, he set out, hoping that his two shots had scared the beast away. Encouraged by these thoughts, he strode rapidly along, and had covered perhaps a hundred yards, when suddenly out of the jungle on his right there rose a loud, appalling roar, followed immediately by another on his left!

On hearing these awe-inspiring sounds, seemingly quite near, the feelings of the sportsman may be easily imagined as he realized the peril he was in. Alone and on foot, with night fast closing round him, and uncertain whether the tigers were behind him or barring the path in front, the situation was one calculated to try the strongest nerves.

His first impulse was to return to the "machan," and he had turned to do so when a rustling of the jungle in this direction quickly changed his purpose, and impelled by this new terror he turned again and fled along the path. He had about two hundred yards to run—a distance he accomplished in remarkably good time! and, finding his "shikari" in the open, they went on together to the bungalow.

The next morning, accompanied by some coolies, they returned to look for the wounded beast, and, following up its track, finally came upon it lying dead just within the larger jungle. The bullet, a semi-hollow one, had struck the shoulder, and, smashing the shoulder-blade, had evidently exploded, the fragments entering the heart, which was reduced almost to pulp. It proved to be a nearly full-grown cub, measuring a good eight foot, and, being bulky in proportion, presented a sufficiently formidable appearance to justify the delight felt by the young sportsman at having, at last, shot his first tiger.

THE NIGHT'S BAG.

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CHAPTER XI

To return to my own adventures. For some months after my night encounter with the leopard while living in the jungle rest house, my life was not very eventful—that is, from a sportsman's point of view. However, one day early in the following camping season, the monotony of our past six months' existence—and all its attendant discomforts, such as the hot and rainy seasons of India alone can produce—was suddenly and most unexpectedly relieved.

It was in the month of December that three of us—the magistrate, the Forest Officer, and myself—were camping along the foot of the Bhutan Hills on our usual cold weather tour, and while on the march one morning, we came upon a small village standing on the edge of some high grass jungle close to the forest.

As we approached, the villagers came crowding round us, talking and gesticulating excitedly after the manner of their kind, the cause of their excitement being a tiger that had killed one of their bullocks early that morning, and dragged the carcass into the long grass.

There being ten elephants with our party, inclusive of three with " howdahs," preparations were made at once to beat out the high grass. The " howdahs " were accordingly posted along the banks of a narrow stream which ran along the edge of this grass, and the rest of the elephants sent round by the open with instructions to beat up from where the forest ended through the grass towards the stream.

As the line approached the " howdahs," a large tiger showed itself for a moment to the occupant of the centre one, who fired immediately. The tiger swerved on receiving the shot, and rushing through the grass, came suddenly upon the " howdah " to the right, which it charged furiously, but was turned again by a shot in the

forearm, and galloped back in the direction of the advancing "line," and, the elephants being at long intervals, managed to get through them.

The line now halted and changed front, while the "howdahs," moving quickly round through the open, were posted inside the grass, some three hundred yards from the forest, the line being directed to advance towards them in the hopes that the tiger, being hit, might be lying up in the grass. However, the grass being very extensive and the number of beating elephants comparatively few, they had to beat in a zigzag fashion to cover as much ground as possible, and hence took some time to reach the "howdahs."

Meanwhile there had been no signs of the tiger, and a consultation was being held as to what had best be done, when suddenly, with a deafening roar, up it sprang under the feet of the beating elephants, and selecting one of them, a female, and unfortunately the most timid of the lot, charged her furiously.

She turned at once to bolt, but before she could get off the tiger, with a rapid and upward movement of the body and forefeet, was on to her hindquarters, then, with its foreclaws embedded near the root of her tail, its hind in her thigh, and the projecting ledge of the pad gripped firmly between its teeth, it clung on, roaring all the time as loudly as its partially closed mouth would allow of.

The unfortunate elephant meanwhile, maddened with pain and terror, was flying through the grass in and out amongst the other elephants, most of which were utterly demoralized, requiring all the skill of their drivers to prevent their bolting too.

To fire at the tiger under the circumstances was obviously impossible, hence it continued its ride unmolested for some time till, probably finding its position somewhat trying, it suddenly let go, and, landing on the grass, bounded off in the direction of the river where it was originally put up.

In the meantime, the panic-stricken elephant continued her mad flight, rushing headlong into the jungle, screaming and trumpeting with terror, evidently under the impression

the tiger was still on her, till at length, pacified by her driver, she was brought into the line.

As the tiger was now fairly roused and certain to charge the line if they attempted to beat it out, the three " howdahs " were brought together, and, advancing in close order, walked along the track left by the tiger in the grass.

They had hardly reached fifty yards, however, when out it came, making straight for the " howdahs." Fortunately, one or more of the shots that rang out simultaneously apparently took effect, for it turned and retired, growling savagely, but only to charge again as the elephants approached and receive another volley.

These proceedings were repeated several times, till, sick of the warm reception it met with each time that it charged, the tiger abandoned its position, taking up another some fifty yards off in a horseshoe-shaped hollow, the entrance to which sloped gradually down and was covered with dense, high grass.

Here the cunning beast was practically unassailable, for to follow it through the high grass would be an extremely hazardous undertaking, since in such dense cover it could make its attacks suddenly and unperceived. Moreover, a depression such as the one it had entered, when concealed with luxuriant growth as this was, often indicates the presence of bogs, or quicksands into which an elephant might suddenly be plunged, and, unable to extricate itself, eventually sink.

Any idea of following the tiger up was therefore out of the question; hence, after a consultation, it was decided to post the beating elephants along the bank, forming the curves of the horseshoe while the " howdahs " faced the entrance. A " shikari " and two police-orderlies, who were amongst those mounted on the beating elephants, were then given shot-guns with directions to fire into the hollow where the grass was densest, and, in concert with all the drivers, to shout as loudly as they could, in the hopes of making the tiger break out to the " howdahs."

This manœuvre was soon accomplished, and with satisfactory results, for no sooner was the shouting commenced and the first volley fired than the tiger broke out and, rushing straight for the entrance, charged the centre

" howdahs," receiving, as it came, two shots from the occupant, one of which passed through its neck.

Yet such is the tenacity of life possessed by these animals and so impetuous is their charge that, in spite of the mortal wound it had received, it was able to complete it. Taking advantage of the elephant's head being lowered to receive the charge, it sprang on to it, and, with its fore-claws buried in the ears and the hind legs on the trunk, remained clinging there till a well-directed shot from the " howdah " on the left, fired with admirable coolness, and planted just behind the shoulders, dislodged the savage brute. The elephant all the while had been trying to shake the tiger off, and no sooner had it dropped than, going suddenly down upon its knees, it proceeded to pommel it with its head.

This sudden change from the horizontal to an almost perpendicular position was perilously disconcerting to those in the " howdah," and near terminating fatally for the sportsman occupying the front seat, who, as the elephant bent down, was pitched on to the rail.

Fortunately, the orderly behind him was quick to grasp the situation and, with equally commendable alacrity, the belt of his Norfolk jacket, to which he hung until the " mahout," by driving his sharp-pointed hook into the elephant's head, induced it to resume its normal position. It was a narrow escape, however, and one the sportsman was not likely to forget, for had he been thrown out, there is little doubt that the elephant, in the temper it was in, would have killed him on the spot.

The tiger, on inspection, was found to be quite dead, with every bone in its body either broken or displaced; but that it had been alive when dislodged was evident, for it was heard growling and snarling while being pommelled by the elephant.

Thus ended an incident which, amongst the many that occur in tiger shooting, might claim to have been an exceptionally exciting one. But, thrilling as had been this late encounter, we were destined to meet with yet another before reaching the camp that night.

The mangled carcase of the tiger having been placed on one of the pad elephants, we, after a brief halt for lunch,

resumed our journey, marching in an extended line, with one " howdah " in the centre and one on either flank.

This formation had been adopted as our route lying through some jungle, it was hoped we might pick up something on the way—a deer, perhaps, or smaller game, such as partridge or pea-fowl, for the pot.

We had not proceeded far, however, when one of the beating elephants—a large tusker that had been behaving somewhat strangely in the recent scuffle—now exhibited marked symptoms of being " must " (mad), and was accordingly removed to one end of the line.

Shortly after this little episode we came to a large patch of high grass jungle, and entering it, had almost reached the end when suddenly a family of three tigers were put up. The country beyond was open, with no other cover for some distance, and the tigers, unwilling to face this open, yet afraid of breaking back through the line of elephants, were fairly in a fix, and, losing their heads, began rushing backwards and forwards in front of the line.

The elephants, utterly demoralized by their extraordinary behaviour, were soon in a state of more or less bewilderment which, in the case of the " must " tusker, already disposed to be troublesome, quickly developed into one of actual frenzy, ending in its becoming altogether beyond control, and in this extremely dangerous condition of mind, it rushed about the jungle, practically at large and free to do any mischief its temporarily diseased brain might suggest.

Coming suddenly upon the tusker carrying a howdah, it charged it furiously. Fortunately the " mahout " of the latter kept his head, and, with a coolness and promptitude born of his dangerous calling, turned his elephant round and made for the open, followed by the maddened brute, now fairly screaming with rage.

Luckily for those in the " howdah," something diverted its attention just as it had reached its intended victim, and stopping suddenly, it turned and, re-entering the grass, came face to face with one of the smaller beating elephants. The latter turned to run, but before it could get round the other charged home, and, catching it broadside on, rolled it completely over and butted at it three or four times. Then, placing its tusks under the side of the

prostrate animal, attempted to turn it over, actually succeeding in raising it a few inches off the ground !

By this time, however, some of the larger and more powerful elephants had been brought up, and these, surrounding the infuriated beast, soon pounded it into a comparatively harmless condition, which its " mahout " took advantage of to regain his lost control. By a free use of his sharp-pointed driving-iron, accompanied by appalling threats of more terrible punishment to follow, he ultimately reduced the animal to a state of absolute subjection, and it was then marched off to the camp, escorted by an elephant on each side of it.

Unfortunately, during the commotion it had caused, the tigers having evidently come to the conclusion that this pandemonium was no place for them, had quietly slipped out, and were now to be seen some half a mile away making for the forest in the distance, where it would have been useless to seek for them.

In the meantime attempts were being made to raise the fallen elephant to its feet, and eventually, with the assistance of four or five others pushing with their heads, and a tusker or two using their tusks as levers, this was successfully accomplished.

The " mahout," generally believed to have been crushed to death as the animal fell over, was now discovered, lying insensible in a grass-covered hollow, under the spot on which the elephant had been lying.

Judging from the nature of his injuries, he must either have fallen with great violence or been grazed by the elephant in its fall, for the whole of his face and left side of the body was badly bruised and swollen up.

However, he was sent off at once to camp and attended by a native doctor belonging to a dispensary in a village near the camp. When he recovered consciousness, he was found to be partially paralysed, but after a few days' treatment recovered completely, but was never able to explain how he came by the injuries, nor could he describe exactly what occurred when the elephant rolled over him. He seemed, however, to realize fully that his escape from death was little short of a miracle, and spent his next month's pay in various offerings to his gods.

The unhappy elephant, however, had no such fortunate escape. When raised to its feet it could hardly stand, and appeared to be suffering great pain.

The "jemadar," or head of the "mahouts," who is also usually the "vet," after a careful examination, was of opinion that it had received some severe internal injuries likely to prove fatal in the end. There were no external signs, save a few surface wounds caused by the tusks, the sharp points of which had been sawn off a few days before, hence none of the wounds were punctured ones.

From the manner in which the animal moved, however, it seemed evident it had been severely and structurally injured, and was with the greatest difficulty taken to camp, where it lingered for a few days, and eventually died in great agony.

Its loss was most serious, representing as it did several hundreds in rupees; but in tiger-shooting, serious accidents are always liable to occur, and when they do, are often—as in the present case—of a kind the least likely to take place.

CHAPTER XII

MEANWHILE, having despatched the injured man to the station hospital on a litter improvised out of a " charpoy " or native bedstead, we continued our tour, and camping daily on the way, finally reached our destination—the military post on the hill where we had arranged to spend Christmas week at the mess, of which we were all honorary members.

Here we learnt from the officers of an extraordinary incident which had befallen one of their number some three weeks before, and that night, after dinner, were told all the particulars by the individual concerned. The story was such a strange one and so full of interesting details that it merits a chapter to itself.

This cantonment, as I have said, was situated on a hill some two thousand feet above the plains, which were covered by vast and almost impenetrable jungles, intersected by swift-rushing mountain streams and infested with herds of wild elephant. Rhinoceroses, tigers, and leopards were also abundant, and pig and deer of all kinds were so plentiful and such comparatively easy prey that the tigers and leopards had ample for their sustenance without being constrained, as is usually their wont, to kill the cattle belonging to the few villages scattered here and there along the military road passing through the forest. Hence the usual method of hunting these animals, by watching over the carcass of any cow or bullock killed by them, or beating the particular patch of jungle into which such carcass had been dragged, could not be adopted; therefore, the only plan likely to be successful was to tie up an old bullock or cow occasionally at nights in some run or path known to be frequented by tigers. If a " kill " took place, a platform was hastily constructed in the

branches of a tree nearest to the spot, and here the sportsman took up his position at sun-down on the chance of the tiger returning to finish what was left of his previous night's dinner. This plan was almost invariably adopted, and most frequently by P——, the officer in question, who being a keen and fearless sportsman, thought little of the risks from fevers or the discomfort, not to say danger, necessarily attendant on these night-long vigils.

He had pursued these tactics for some weeks, but so far had not been fortunate—either his " baits " broke away and wandered home, or were killed during the dark phases of the moon. He watched over some of these " kills " and fired a shot or two in the direction in which the tiger could be heard at his meal, but whether he hit or missed he could not tell, at any rate the morning light never revealed anything dead, except the remains of the unfortunate " kill."

However, perseverance at last was apparently about to be rewarded, for one bright afternoon, at a time when the moon was at her best, the " shikari," who had been to visit the " baits," reported that a bullock, tied in the bed of a dry river in the heart of the forest, had been killed, apparently by a large tiger, as the body had been dragged a considerable distance into a comparatively open patch of jungle, close to which was a suitable tree for a platform, the upper branches commanding a full view of the carcass. The " shikari " added that he had already constructed the " machan," or platform, and suggested that as evening was approaching the sahib had better start at once. P——, as may be supposed, was not likely to make any unnecessary delay, but as the distance was about five miles and it was likely to be late before he could reach the spot, he obtained permission from his commanding officer to take one of the regimental elephants, a steady old female, on which, with his 12-bore rifle and a couple of rugs with the shikari behind him, he was soon *en route*.

When he arrived at the " kill " it was getting dark, but still there was sufficient light to clamber into the tree, which he did off the elephant's back and with the assistance of the " shikari." He noticed as he got up that the tree was rather a slender one. However, as he found his platform

steady enough and sufficiently high to be safe from any attack the tiger could make, he felt quite secure; and so, dismissing the "shikari" and elephant with instructions to stay the night in a village about two miles off and to come for him in the morning, he made himself as comfortable as he could on his lofty perch and waited longingly for the moon to rise, as he feared, in spite of the disturbance caused by his arrival, that the tiger would come while it was yet dark. But apparently "stripes" had no such intention, for two or three long hours passed without any signs of him.

The moon was now shining brightly and all around was as light as day. P—— noticed that, though there was very heavy jungle for miles around, immediately to the right of where he sat the cover was comparatively light, thinning down to low scrub in the direction of the river-bed, which was plainly visible about a hundred yards off. He had completed his reconnaissance and was beginning to find the time going rather slowly when he fancied he heard the soft, muffled tread and low, purring sound, so familiar to the sportsman, with which a tiger approaches when suspecting danger. Soon these sounds became so distinct and drew nearer so steadily that P—— felt the tiger might show at any moment. He had brought his rifle to the ready when he heard at some little distance off, but rapidly approaching, a noise as of several heavy bodies crashing quickly through the jungle fringing the opposite bank of the river-bed, and loud squeals and trumpeting, as if all the elephants in the country had assembled. Soon a gigantic male elephant, with huge tusks, rushed out into the river-bed, and going down it as fast as he could disappeared from view. He was followed almost immediately by a large herd of some twenty elephants, evidently in pursuit of him, and apparently in a furious rage, for they were squealing and trumpeting as they went and going at a tremendous pace, as though determined to catch the fugitive.

All chance of the tiger was now, of course, at an end, for, though tigers are not as a rule shy of wild elephants, a disturbance of the kind I have described was enough to scare any wild animal.

P—— was naturally much interested in the very rare scene he had just witnessed, for it is not every sportsman who has the luck to see an unruly " tusker " being driven out of a herd ; at the same time he could not but feel that " the show " had not only lost him his tiger but had condemned him to a long and useless solitary vigil for the rest of the night. He little thought of the exciting experience which was in store for him.

The troop of pursuing elephants had now passed out of sight, but could still be heard faintly in the distance, and P—— made preparations for passing as comfortable a night as was possible under the circumstances. Accordingly, securing his rifle as best he could to the platform, he lay down, inclined to sleep, but kept awake by a faint hope that the tiger might yet return. He was, however, just dozing off when he was roused by the noise of the herd returning, and soon saw them in Indian file, passing quietly up the river-bed on their way back to the jungle from which they had originally come. They were quickly out of sight and hearing. From their present quiet and peaceful demeanour it was evident that the " rogue " had been effectually driven off—at least, this was the conclusion arrived at by the young sportsman who, now that this little excitement was over, lit his pipe for a final smoke before returning to his rugs. He had hardly begun, however, when he heard what sounded like another elephant moving through the jungle into which the " rogue " had been driven, and suddenly a large tusker appeared walking slowly up the river-bed. As he came in a line with P——'s tree he halted, and raising his trunk in the air appeared to be scenting something. Then, turning to his right, he came slowly on, scenting as he walked ; this movement brought him to within some twenty-five yards abreast of the tree. To P—— who was watching him with considerable interest, he appeared as though about to pass on into the jungle when, without the slightest warning, the great brute, suddenly turning at right angles to his course, charged straight at the tree ! Fortunately for P—— he was standing up at the time, with his hand on a bough, and had just time to throw his arms round it. Otherwise, so completely had he been taken by surprise that the terrific

crash which followed would most certainly have hurled him off the platform and left him at the mercy of the furious beast below. As it was, he had the greatest difficulty in maintaining his position, for, not satisfied with the one attempt, the elephant returned again and again to the charge, the tree bending to each blow, having, as already mentioned, a somewhat slender trunk and being a comparatively young and elastic tree. Had it not been so it must assuredly have snapped under the heavy blows so frequently repeated.

In the meanwhile the young officer's position was indeed a most perilous one, and his feelings may be better imagined than described. He could not tell how long the elephant would persist in his attacks nor how much longer the tree would withstand them. Casting a hurried look down he found that another misfortune had befallen him—his rifle had slipped from its place on the platform and had stuck in some branches a little lower down, where he could not reach it without relinquishing his hold of the bough. This he dared not do, as the elephant, when not actually butting at the tree, watched him intently, the slightest movement on his part being immediately followed by an impetuous charge.

This extraordinary one-sided duel had been going on for about ten minutes when the elephant, apparently tired of his futile attempts to dislodge the sportsman, or to gain time to concoct a fresh plan of attack, began to march slowly off. Seizing this opportunity, P—— let go his hold and, leaning over the platform, seized his rifle, but the very slight noise he made in recovering it was sufficient for the wily brute below, who turned in a second and charged more furiously than ever. Luckily, P—— had regained his position before the shock came, and was able, though with difficulty, as he was now hampered by the gun, to hold on.

The elephant charged once more and then suddenly changed its tactics. Putting up its trunk in search of something to lay hold of, it saw the end of the thin rope with which the platform had been secured to the branch. This had slipped off in the struggle and was now dangling down. The great brute promptly seized hold of it with

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his trunk, and P——, to his intense horror and consternation, found himself gradually drawn towards the ground, as the bough bent under the strain! The branch creaked and must soon have parted, when providentially the rope snapped and the bough, rebounding with considerable force, nearly accomplished what the elephant had been so long attempting to do. Fortunately, however, P—— was prepared and, though much bruised and shaken, still held on.

Now came his opportunity. The elephant, for the moment taken by surprise, stood still, gazing upwards, and P——, placing the muzzle of his rifle between his left arm and the bough, fired it at the brute's head, hitting him apparently, but too high up for the shot to be fatal. Maddened with rage and pain, the now doubly infuriated animal dashed at the tree again but, missing it in his headlong charge, passed on, giving P—— time to fire the second barrel, which he did, apparently with considerable effect, for the elephant on receiving the shot seemed to quicken its pace and dashed into the jungle. By this time P—— had put in fresh cartridges, and he now fired both barrels in quick succession at what he could see of the retreating animal through the trees. These shots evidently settled any doubt the elephant might have had as to returning to the attack, for he continued his flight, as could be guessed from the sounds of his heavy tread and the crashing of the jungle, which became fainter and fainter till finally lost altogether in the distance.

P—— had now leisure to consider his position, and could not but feel thankful for his marvellous escape. Not that he was by any means out of the wood yet, in more senses than one. Consulting his watch he found it was but little past one o'clock, and he could look for no succour for another four or five hours to come. In the meanwhile the elephant might return at any moment—he knew full well the vindictive disposition of these animals, particularly the solitary "rogues"—and if this one did return, further infuriated as it was by the wounds it had received, it would not be likely to retire again without making every effort to obtain its revenge. It was, therefore, necessary to be fully prepared for such a contingency. But what

could be done to make his position more secure? He looked about him in the hope of finding a tree better suited to withstand the severe shocks he had experienced, but could not see one that he had any means of climbing. Then the idea of getting down and making his way through the forest occurred to him, but only to be dismissed as hopelessly impracticable; for, in the first place, he was not at all sure that he could find his way to the village where his own elephant was, and there was no other refuge for him. Secondly, for all he knew, the "rogue" might have worked his way round to the very jungle through which his path lay. No; there was nothing to be done but to stay where he was and to go through the long anxious hours with all the fortitude he could summon. So, hauling in what remained of the dangling rope, which had so nearly proved fatal to him, he sat down on the platform and commenced his long and anxious vigil. Sleep was, of course, out of the question, for even had he felt drowsy he dared not yield to the feeling, for if the elephant returned, obviously his only chance was to be fully prepared for him, and if possible to give him a fatal shot or cripple him before he had time to charge. But, as a matter of fact, sleep was the last thing he thought of; the events of the night had been far too exciting, and the recollection of the horrors he had so recently undergone were more than sufficient to dispel any feelings of somnolence.

Hour after hour dragged slowly on, each one seeming longer than the last, but happily they brought so sign of the "rogue's" return. At last the dawn appeared, and shortly afterwards a distant rustling told of something approaching and soon the heavy tread and crashing of branches left little doubt as to what it was. P——, seizing his rifle, started up. "The rogue again!" was naturally his first thought, but now the sound of human voices reached his ears, and a minute or two later, instead of the truculent "tusker" he had expected, there appeared in the river-bed the benign countenance of the good tempered old lady off whose back he had scrambled the night before into his uncomfortable and perilous position in the tree.

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ALIVE TO TELL THE TALE.

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Never was sight of elephant more welcome, for P—— had not expected his deliverance so early. He was soon on her back jogging merrily homewards, and congratulating himself on being still alive to tell the tale of his midnight adventure with a wild elephant!

CHAPTER XIII

THE story of this strange adventure made such an impression on our minds that we decided to change the programme of our tour, and instead of continuing our march by the military road, as we had intended, resolved to go through the forest instead in the hopes of perhaps obtaining a shot at this "rogue."

In addition to the necessity for destroying so dangerous an animal, this opportunity of adding an elephant to our bag seemed to us too good a one to be lost, for although wild elephants were plentiful in the district and were a constant source of danger to travellers by the road, it was not until one of them had proved itself to be actually dangerous to human life that the game laws of the period allowed of its being shot. But although we had decided to travel through the forest, it was not an undertaking to be easily accomplished. In the first place, the distance to the sub-divisional headquarters, where we were bound, was over twenty miles, which through such dense jungle would occupy two days at least, one mile an hour—and that only during daylight—being the most we could hope to make good in one day. Secondly, the journey being only possible on elephants, we had to travel light, hence could take no tents, but sleep as best we might under some sheltering tree; and as to food, tinned soups and meat would be our only fare, for to light a fire in the forest was strictly against rules.

However, in spite of these discomforts staring us in the face, we were not to be deterred, so having sent off our tents, howdahs, and camp equipage by road, we started from our camp, to which we had come down the night before, early one morning a day or two after Christmas Day, and entering the forest almost immediately, commenced

what proved to be the most arduous, but at the same time most interesting journey I have ever made.

We progressed quite rapidly at first, following one of the fire-lines—broad lanes cut at intervals across a forest to minimize the damage in the case of fires; but after a mile or two our troubles commenced, for as our route now lay at right angles to this path, it was no longer of any use to us, so we had to bore our way into the forest, making a road for ourselves with the elephants and keeping our direction by chart and compass.

But even with these aids to navigation, we should soon have lost our way had it not been for the sagacity of our guide—and, as he proved later, also our " philosopher and friend "—the same old wild man of the woods, Dhundhos, already mentioned in connection with a former expedition, who now, mounted on the leading elephant, directed our footsteps in the way that they should go.

Perched monkey-wise on the pad behind the " mahout " —a grey-bearded Mohammedan—he conveyed his directions to the latter in a manner which was evidently most annoying to that venerable individual, as we could see from the expression on his face and the vain attempts he made to wriggle out of reach of his tormentor.

Nor was this surprising, for the latter, leaning well forward, had gripped the old man firmly by the shoulders, and from this dominating position kept twisting his body to the right or left, according to the direction he wished the elephant to be driven; and as this was constantly being changed, the torture and indignity suffered by the driver in being thus made use of as a steering wheel, may be easily imagined.

Nevertheless, this method of steering, if somewhat unique, was eminently successful, for it enabled us to proceed in the right direction, though our progress was necessarily slow, since it was only by twisting and turning through the labyrinth of trees and creepers that we could make any advance at all, and at times were confronted with such impenetrable masses of both that we were obliged to halt and send two more elephants ahead to force a passage through.

The further we advanced the greater were the difficulties

we encountered, for as we penetrated deeper into the forest we found the trees not only larger but standing too close to each other to leave sufficient space for our elephants to pass, consequently we had to make long detours—often of several hundred yards—before we came upon a navigable passage and even then had to cut away the creepers to get through.

* * * * *

To those who have never journeyed through the heart of an Indian forest it would be difficult to convey in ordinary language anything approaching an accurate idea of the situation or of the feelings of the traveller who has ventured to undertake the journey, when he finds himself suddenly cut off from the world and surrounded by a seemingly impenetrable wall of trees and undergrowth so dense as to conceal all but the higher branches of the latter.

But this is not all, for to these conditions must be added the gloomy, death-like silence which pervades all Indian jungles in the daytime, when even the beasts that prowl by night are hushed in tired sleep, and lastly, but no less awe-inspiring, an almost night-like darkness, for the sun, however brightly shining, can barely pierce the canopy of foliage overhead.

* * * * *

Such, then, was the position we had been in for six long weary hours of arduous travel when we suddenly emerged into the light and found ourselves on the verge of a savanna extending for several hundred yards in front of us and to the distant line of trees where the forest recommenced.

The savannas, as they are termed, are usually below the level of the forest, hence during the rains resemble swampy, marsh land, producing a luxuriant growth of a reedy kind of grass often twelve to fifteen feet in height, and a favourite resort for the larger beasts of the forest, such as the rhinoceros, sambbur, and other kind of deer, which during the cold, dry season lie up there in the daytime probably because they find it warmer than in the heavier jungle.

In most of the large forests, there are usually two or

three such savannas to be found at long intervals and varying in size, but the one now before us was exceptionally large, about three-quarters of a mile in breadth by possibly half as long again in length and, according to our knowledgeable old shikari, contained the highest and densest growth of any in that forest.

In these circumstances, added to the fact that our elephants had been having a very strenuous time, we decided to halt for an hour or so to rest them whilst their drivers and ourselves, not to waste this precious time, took this opportunity of making a midday meal, which, in the case of the former, consisted of parched rice and "goor," a species of dried molasses, made up into lumps.

We ate our respective luncheons seated on our elephants, the latter the while making a more substantial meal off the branches of some trees which they had discovered and seemed to find most appetising judging from the quantity they devoured, as wandering at will, they moved amongst the trees selecting those they preferred. But the Forest Officer, under whose orders we had placed ourselves while in his domains, soon had us on the move again, and rightly, for the sun had already passed the meridian, and it was necessary that we should reach a halting-place and prepare our night's encampment before it was absolutely dark.

The order of our march was now, however, changed from Indian file to line so as to cover as much of the grass jungle as we could in the hope of arousing some slumbering beast within its depths—the rogue elephant itself, perhaps, as was not unlikely—in which case a better chance of obtaining a shot at it was scarcely likely to be afforded us, though we realized that if only wounded we should be exposed to the full fury of its attack, for in the grass there were no trees or creepers to obstruct it and thus give us time to fire again before it charged home.

However, as the sole object of the expedition was the destruction of this beast, we were prepared to take all risks, so marshalling the elephants into line with one of us in the centre and one on either flank, we advanced slowly through the grass, every eye and ear on the alert to detect

the slightest movement or catch the faintest sound of any animal in front.

But alas! though perhaps fortunately for us, there were no signs of the rogue, nor till we were more than half-way through, of anything endowed with life, when suddenly up rose some monstrous beast almost under my feet! A rhinoceros, we concluded, from its size and headlong flight, but could not be sure, for nothing smaller than an elephant was to be distinguished in that grass.

A minute or two later there was another disturbance of the grass, further to our front, a slow, sinuous kind of movement as of some animal moving stealthily away. At the same moment I heard the old "shikari" call out "bagh," then two shots fired in quick succession followed by a roar proving the old man to be right; half threatening, half defiant and wholly terrifying in its volume and ferocity, there was no mistaking that awe-inspiring sound.

For it was in truth a tiger we had roused, and from its speaking to the shots we hoped that it was hit. Advancing the two flanks to form a semicircle, we pressed forward as rapidy as the jungle would permit, with a view to surrounding the beast, if wounded, and cutting it off from the forest beyond; but, alas, we were again to be disappointed, for as we came upon the track it had made we could find no trace of blood on the grass.

We now learnt that it was the Forest Officer who had fired, but, as he admitted, merely at a venture, seeing the top of the grass shaking with the movement of the animal some twelve feet below, he had guessed at its position and fired on the chance of his shots taking effect, but, as might be expected, had evidently missed. However, we followed up the trail to where it entered the forest; then, most reluctantly, abandoned the pursuit.

Resuming our original formation, we now proceeded on our way, and boring through the forest for some hours as before, finally reached a comparatively treeless little glade, where, as the light was now diminishing, we decided to halt for the night. The preparation of our camp we entrusted to Dhundhos, whom we knew from past experience to be an adept at this business, and he proved so again.

No sooner were the elephants unloaded and divested

of their pads than he set to work. Selecting a spot about ten feet square, surrounded by some stunted trees, he ordered two of the " mahouts " to take their elephants inside to tear away the creepers and tread down all the undergrowth. This done he spread one of the tarpaulins on the trampled foliage to serve the purposes of a carpet.

His next proceeding was to collect all the pads which he caused to be placed edgeways on the ground, propped up against the tree trunks, thus completing an enclosure or zareba, which with its encircling walls of some four feet in height, made as good a shelter as the most fastidious sportsman could desire.

Having completed these arrangements he stood for some time surveying his handiwork with evident satisfaction till it seemed suddenly to occur to him that the structure might with advantage be provided with a roof—an idea he had no sooner conceived than he proceeded to carry out with a rapidity and thoroughness characteristic of all this old man's actions, for despite his years and seemingly physical incapacity, he was singularly free from the apathy and inertia so often found in natives of all classes.

Calling on the mahouts to bring him another tarpaulin, he quickly had it rigged up as a canopy over the enclosure, utilizing four of the corner trees as posts, then suspending a hurricane lantern from one of the branches underneath, he came up to us and reported that our bedroom was ready.

Meanwhile the magistrate and myself had been seeing to the elephants being securely tethered with chains, each by its hind legs to a tree, as well as hobbles round the fore-feet to prevent their straying in case they broke away, which they would probably attempt to do should a herd of their wild brethren or the rogue be in the neighbourhood and approach the camp during the night.

The Forest Officer, however, had been differently employed. Ever mindful of his bugbear, a forest fire, he had forbidden any cooking to be done by the men or even by his own cook, who on hearing of the order had come to him in despair, begging to be exempted for, as he pleaded

tearfully, how could he possibly serve a dinner of cold tinned soup and raw potatoes to the sahibs even with "hart-bile yegg" * to follow? or dare to send up such a meal without the certainty of "bamboo bukshish" † in return!

His real grievance being that in spite of his orders to take tinned provisions only, he had, it seemed, surreptitiously brought with him a half-cooked chicken and some cutlets, which he had intended warming up and serving; but now, finding himself minus the element necessary for this operation, he was at his wits' ends to devise a decent dinner for his sahibs!

The above is no exaggerated example of the devotion of native servants to their masters in those good old days—but now, alas! very seldom seen—though possibly in this case an ulterior motive was not altogether absent, for the cook was probably as averse to cold food as his masters!

But to go on with the story. The Forest Officer was deaf to all entreaties for some time. At length, won over by the eloquence of the man, more especially with respect to his description of the very uninviting meal he had suggested, he yielded to the extent of allowing him to light a small, well protected oil stove which formed part of our equipment.

This amusing duologue had been going on within earshot of where we stood, and being naturally interested in the subject after our long fast, we went up closer to find the stove now alight and the cook engaged in the somewhat difficult task of trying to warm up two dishes on it simultaneously, there being barely room for one.

But this was only a portion of his trouble. Seated on the ground beside him was his inexorable master who, keeping a watchful eye upon the flame, turned it down from time to time till nearly out, and while thus retarding the operations was cursing the bewildered chef for being so slow.

Amused at these proceedings, yet somewhat apprehensive as to their effect upon our dinner, we attempted

* Hard-boiled eggs.

† An Anglo-Indian slangism for a thrashing.

to remonstrate with our friend but in vain, and as a result dined that night off warm, but half-cooked food. However, we were too hungry to be over fastidious, but it must have been very galling to the cook, after all his scheming, to have to serve up such a meal!

CHAPTER XIV

We had dinner, picnic fashion, on the floor of our enclosure, and then a smoke, the first since we started and only permitted now because, as our leader declared, he could not resist our special pleading, but as he was an inveterate smoker himself, his statement was open to suspicion, more especially as we noticed he had his pipe and tobacco all ready beside him whereas ours had been packed away, obediently, in our travelling bags.

Night had now set in, and except for the light from our lantern, and another suspended from a tree outside, the darkness was intense which added to the absolute stillness of the forest, and the fact that being on the ground we were practically at the mercy of any prowling beast that might happen to come our way, produced a curious feeling of excitement difficult to describe but which, in my own case, I confess, was not unmixed with fear.

And yet, despite the awe-inspiring nature of the situation, there was something extraordinarily fascinating in the mere fact of being in the very heart of that huge forest where few human beings had probably ever been before, and none certainly had passed the night, except a forest guard perhaps, but even he would keep his lonely vigil in comparative security in his hut perched on a tree.

Absorbed in these reflections, we had been smoking in silence for some time, when suddenly from the elephants, tethered here and there all round us, there rose a deafening chorus of trumpeting and squeals mingled with human voices shouting "Bhaloo—dotho bhaloo" * in agonizing tones, as of men already in the grip of the animals named. Seizing our rifles, lying ready loaded close at hand, we rushed out at once, and from the light of the outer lantern

* "Bears—two bears."

caught a glimpse of two large, black, furry objects disappearing into the darkness beyond. From their shape and shambling gait, they were bears without a doubt, but we had no time to fire, and as it was obviously impossible to follow them through such a jungle in the dark, we eventually returned to our pipes bemoaning our bad luck.

The incident had caused quite a commotion in the camp, and even when order had been finally restored, we were far too excited to think of going to bed. Our men, too, in their encampment a yard or two from ours, were evidently in a similar frame of mind, and were listening interestedly to the old shikari, who was recounting an adventure he had once himself experienced with a bear.

We listened too, somewhat listlessly at first, but were soon as interested in his narrative as the others, for the old man, in his own peculiar way, was an excellent raconteur, and his story, told with all the verve and gesticulation of the finished native story-teller, was one of the strangest we had ever heard. It referred to a period when serving as a forest guard; he had also filled the office of "shikari" and constant attendant to some by-gone Forest Officer, whom he designated as "Juxon Sahib," doubtless meaning Jackson.

His narrative, reproduced as faithfully as is possible in English, was as under.

Late one evening in December, the Forest Officer, accompanied by the narrator and some coolies, while proceeding to a rest house by one of the forest paths, came suddenly upon a bear standing across the track and clawing at something lying on the ground. The animal looked up and for the moment seemed as if about to attack them, but evidently alarmed at seeing so large a party, changed its mind and dashed off into the jungle, exposing to view the figure of a man, lying on his back apparently unconscious and bleeding from head to foot.

A wood-cutter's axe lay near him and adhering to its edge was a tuft of hair and grizzle and, a few paces off, what seemed to be the upper part of a bear's ear.

A closer examination of the man showed that he had been terribly mauled, especially about the face, of which there was little left except the eyes, the rest of the features

being practically obliterated by long furrows, seemingly made by claws, deep into the flesh ; the chest, arms, and legs too, were all severely clawed, also the hands and feet.

Useless as it seemed to move him, humanity required this should be done, for while there is life there's hope, and a hospital was not many miles away : a litter of twigs and branches was accordingly constructed on the spot and in it the mutilated body carried to the village. Here a " dooli "* and bearers were procured, and the unfortunate individual was sent into the hospital.

The next day the Forest Officer, who was proceeding home on furlough, resumed his journey to the railway station, *en route* to Bombay, and soon, amidst new scenes and faces, the matter passed out of his mind.

Six months had gone by since the incident above related ; the Forest Officer, presumably named Jackson, had just returned to the district at the expiration of his leave and was again, shortly after his return, occupying the rest house.

One evening on his way back from the forest, he came upon a hut built in the lower branches of a tree, a mile or so from the village, and at the bottom of the tree, cooking his evening meal, was seated an individual who, as he stood up and " salaamed " to the " sahib," presented a most remarkable appearance.

His head and face were swathed in a huge " pugri," leaving no features visible except the eyes. In figure, he was tall and unusually broad-shouldered, but his arms and legs were lean and withered, and his hands and feet mere bones, covered with skin and claw-like in appearance.

Being questioned as to his presence there, for outsiders are not permitted to reside within the forest, he produced a written permit, dated some months before and signed by the officer then in charge.

No one seemed to know from whence he had come, but to the forest guards and villagers he was known as the " man without a face," and finally, with the superstition common to this class, had come to be regarded as some mysterious holy being specially favoured by the gods.

* Palanquin.

However, as the man, whoever he might be, was evidently quite harmless, Jackson took no further action, but cautioning him to be careful about fires, walked on to the rest house.

The next morning, to his surprise, this mysterious being appeared at the bungalow asking for employment, and Jackson, somewhat interested in the man, appointed him as one of the temporary wood cutters in the forest. A week or two went by, during which time he was often to be seen like some unquiet spirit prowling round the camp, speaking to no one and seldom replying when addressed, and then only by a word or two in a strange inhuman voice.

At length one evening, as Jackson was sitting smoking on the verandah, he saw the man approaching, but with some hesitation as if uncertain of the reception he would meet with. Presently he came up and, making a low "salaam," produced a dirty scrap of paper which he laid at Jackson's feet.

"What is this?" inquired the latter sharply, annoyed at being disturbed after his hard day's work.

"A petition for a gun and ammunition, sahib, to protect his poor servant from the wild beasts," replied the man in his strange voice, shifting his weight from one leg to the other, as is the way with native rustics when addressing Europeans.

Had he asked permission to set fire to the forest the request could hardly have created greater consternation. "A gun!" exclaimed the annoyed and horrified official, as visions of deer and other animals, slaughtered indiscriminately, rose before his mind. "Why, don't you know, no one is permitted to use firearms in the forest?"

"Yes, sahib, your slave is aware that such is the order of the 'Sirkar' (Government), but here the 'Huzoor' (master) is a law unto himself, and will surely grant the prayer of his petitioner, whose life is threatened by these beasts!"

"Nonsense," replied the incensed official, on whom this special pleading failed to take effect. "You cannot have a gun, and if I ever hear that you have used one in the forest I shall cancel your permit to reside in it."

Seeing the " sahib " was evidently in earnest, the man made no reply, but with another low " salaam " went off, seeming to accept the decision as a final one.

However, a few days later, Jackson was seated by the camp fire late one night, giving some orders to a ranger, when suddenly a loud report, as of a gun, came echoing through the forest. Seizing his rifle, which with a lantern he always kept beside him, he rushed off in the direction whence the sound proceeded, accompanied by the ranger and his shikari.

As they approached nearer they heard another shot, followed by the sounds of some one shouting, and mingling with the sound, some low gurgling noise as if some animal was in pain, all evidently proceeding from the hut of the recluse.

A minute or two later they arrived there, to find this mysterious individual armed with a huge axe, dancing round what seemed to be a pit, and striking furiously at some animal which had, apparently, fallen into it.

The man seemed for the moment quite beside himself with rage, and from his manner and appearance might well have been mistaken for some wild man of the woods as savage and uncontrolled as any of his four-footed companions.

The animal in the pit proved to be a bear and a huge one of its kind, but in a most pitiable condition, its head and face being hacked almost to pieces, yet whilst bleeding at every pore the beast was still alive and making frantic efforts to climb out. Jackson, to end its sufferings, quickly fired a bullet through its brain; then, assisted by the others, seized the madman, for such he seemed to be, and, after a sharp struggle, deprived him of his weapon.

Nevertheless he continued struggling for a time, but his captors, both strong, determined men, soon overpowered him and, with a rope found lying near the hut, secured his arms and legs. But though secured he was not yet conquered and continued tearing at his bonds in his efforts to get free, his mind evidently still bent on inflicting further injuries on his victim, regardless of the fact that the beast was now quite dead.

From the extraordinary and seemingly unreasonable

animosity he displayed towards the animal, Jackson was now satisfied that the man was either temporarily insane or had some special motive for acting as he did and, inclined to take the latter view, he determined by judicious questioning to ascertain the truth.

Ignoring for the time his disobedience of orders as to the gun, he asked him why, when armed with this deadlier weapon, he had not shot the animal outright instead of endangering his own life by attacking it with an axe ?

The man looked at him sullenly, without replying; but on the question being repeated, this sullen mood seemed suddenly to leave him and, placing the palms of his hands together, as is the manner of natives when desirous of showing their submission and respect, he cried out, " If the sahib will free his bonds his slave will tell him all."

This sudden change in his demeanour might have seemed suspicious but for his being so evidently in earnest, and Jackson, eager to hear the promised story, was not disposed to be too cautious. Stooping down he undid the fastenings round his wrists, and no sooner had he done so than the man tore off his " pugri," and unwinding the strappings round his face, pointed to it exclaiming, " This, sahib, is the reason why I asked the ' Huzoor ' for a gun, and why I did not kill the bear outright, for it was he who made me what I am, a terror to all beholders, and I had vowed to be revenged."

Jackson started back in horrified amazement, for never had he seen a human face so terribly transformed. There was not a feature left on it. The nose was gone entirely, two holes alone indicating its position, while the mouth was but a shapeless opening displaying most of the teeth ; nothing in fact remained as nature had created them except the eyes which had fortunately escaped the general demolition.

" But how do you know it was this particular animal, for bears are plentiful in the forest ? " asked Jackson, after he had, to some extent, recovered from the shock.

" Protector of the poor, if there were a thousand I would know him ! for he bears a mark not easy to mistake

The ' Huzoor ' will find this beast has only one ear, the other I cut off when he stood up to attack me."

" I could have killed him then," he continued, the light of madness returning to his eyes, " but that he knocked the axe out of my hand. After that I knew no more till I found myself in hospital and heard some people talking round me, saying to one another, ' Surely this man will die ! '

" But the ' Doctor Sahib ' came later and poured what felt like liquid fire into my wounds, then sewed them up and gave me some magic drug which eased the pain at once so that I slept. He came again next morning and when he had seen the wounds he told me I should live, and I felt glad, for I thought that if the ' Doctor Sahib ' says this it must be true."

Here he paused as if what he had still to relate was too painful to recall, but Jackson, now keenly interested in the story, urged him to proceed.

" Well, sahib," he exclaimed, " the Doctor Sahib was right, and in three months I was cured and started for my home, far away in the Punjab ; but when I arrived there my friends and relations did not know me, even my wife and children fled from me in terror, calling upon the villagers to protect them from this devil ! and finally, with blows and curses, I was driven from the village.

" For weeks I wandered in the jungle, living the life of a wild beast and brooding over my sad fate till I thought I should go mad. Then suddenly, one day the idea came into my mind to return and be revenged upon the animal that had brought me to this condition. From that moment I thought of nothing else but how to accomplish my revenge. An evil spirit seemed to have taken possession of me ; I was no longer master of myself but under its control, and, finally yielding to its influence, I returned here resolved to find the animal and kill him if I could. Obtaining permission from the ' Forest Sahib,' I built that hut upon the tree, where I slept by day and sat watching for the beast at nights, for it was here he had attacked me ; hence I guessed his lair could not be far, beside I knew that yonder mohowa tree when in fruit would be likely to attract him.

" For three long months I had waited, watching every night, till at length, only five nights ago, a bear passed beneath the hut on his way to the mohowa, now laden with its flower-fruit. The moon was shining brightly and I could see him as clearly as by day.

" In the white light of the moon he seemed to be quite black and big almost as an elephant, but his head had a strange appearance as if one side of it was higher than the other. This puzzled me for a moment, then I nearly shouted out with joy, for I saw now that it was one of his ears, which seemed longer than the other, that gave him the strange appearance ! It was the bear I had come to seek, without a doubt, but to make quite sure I waited until he returned and as he passed on his way back to the forest I looked more closely and found to my delight that the left ear was missing, almost from its root !

" I watched no more that night, but too excited to sleep, lay awake some hours, trying to devise some plan to kill the beast, for now that I had seen him I was all the more determined he should die—but how, seeing that I was unarmed ?

" True I had my axe, but that was a poor weapon with which to fight a bear, as I knew from sad experience, and I dared not trust to it again.

" At length, tired of trying to solve the difficulty, I dropped off to sleep, but while I slept my brain had not been idle, and I awoke to find the problem solved and a scheme, which gave promise of success, already to my hand.

" It was then I asked the ' Huzoor ' for a gun and failing to obtain it, stole one from a ' kyah ' (trader) in the village, an old flint weapon only, but sufficient for the purpose I had in view, for it was no part of my plan to kill the bear outright ! The next day I dug a deep pit beneath my tree, and in the evening, covering it over with light branches, I sat up all that night waiting for my enemy to come.

" For three whole nights I watched in vain, and then at last he came, slowly and with a waddling gait. His footsteps doubtless directed by the evil one, he walked straight towards the pit; in another moment he was over

it, the branches bent and gave under his weight, he plunged wildly forward, and the next instant his hind quarters disappeared into the pit!

"At last my hour of vengeance had come. The animal, buried up to his shoulders in the hole, was now quite helpless, and as I watched him struggling to get out, I rejoiced to think that now I could repay the injury he had done me; but to do so with safety to myself it was necessary to make sure he could not climb out of the pit.

"The gun, with both barrels loaded with ball, was lying close at hand, and taking up the weapon I fired it at the beast, being careful to avoid a fatal spot, but in my anxiety to do this I missed altogether. However, with the next barrel I was more successful, breaking his right shoulder.

"Satisfied now that he was unable to climb out, I got down and attacked him with my axe intending to put another bullet through his head, as soon as I had marked his face as he had mine!"

As he concluded his weird story, told in the flowery language of his race with many an exponential gesture, he fell at Jackson's feet and touching them with his forehead, in token of repentance, begged to be forgiven.

For, as with the Bersakers of old, the "furious fit" had left him weak in mind and body, and realizing now the enormity of his offence he was eager to evade the punishment he had good reason to expect. Fortunately for him, his story had recalled to Jackson's mind the scene he had once witnessed in the forest, and now finding that this was the poor mutilated being he had rescued from the clutches of the bear, he was more disposed to pity than to punish him. At the same time he had to bear in mind that the stealing of the gun was a criminal offence, and firing it in the forest a serious one against the forest laws, to say nothing of the cruelty to the bear, which, as a sportsman, seemed to him the worst offence of all.

However, taking into consideration the nature of his injuries and all the man had subsequently suffered, Jackson came to the conclusion that his was not a case

to be judged by the ordinary standard of morality. The sight of those awful mutilated features made a deep impression on his mind, and thinking to himself what his own feelings would have been under similar conditions, he forgave him for all he had done, even to his treatment of the bear!

CHAPTER XV

THE old man's story took him some time to relate, for much of it was told in quite oratorial style, with pauses here and there to point the tragic portions; thus, although told in an execrable kind of Billingsgate Hindustani, it was nevertheless an artistic piece of diction.

When he had concluded, we rewarded him for the entertainment he had given us with a tot of neat brandy—which he was rather partial to, and swallowed at a gulp, rubbing the pit of his stomach by way of expressing its agreeable effects, then salaaming to each of us in turn, retired to join his comrades, who had all been seated, listening open-mouthed, outside.

We sat up for a while after he left, smoking and discussing his strange story, but tired out with our long and arduous journey, the excitement caused by the sudden appearance of the bears had no sooner subsided, than nature reasserted her claims and aided by the silent, soporific nature of our surroundings, we soon dropped off to sleep. The rest of the night passed uneventfully, though later on we were disturbed from time to time by the calls of various animals in the distance—the most frequent of them being the peculiar, bell-like sound made by the sambur, and finally by one which, if once heard, can never be forgotten or mistaken for any other.

It was just as day was breaking—though still dark as night with us—when we were roused from our deepest sleep by this loud, appalling cry—a long-drawn, reverberating roar, which I can only liken to that strange, awe-inspiring sound which generally precedes an earthquake in the East and makes one wonder what will happen next!

Continuing with short intervals for nearly half an hour,

it gradually died away as the animal that emitted it—a tiger, needless to say—having probably scented our elephants, moved further off. By this time, however, the whole encampment was astir, and we could hear the men discussing these dread sounds in hushed and terror-stricken voices—all except the old shikari, who as usual took the matter philosophically, taunting the others and laughing at their fears.

But even he, we noticed, was careful to refer to the animal as a "geedur"—the Bengali for jackal—a proof that he was not so indifferent to the tiger's proximity as he seemed, for there is a belief, current amongst some natives of Bengal, that tigers resent being discussed by human beings and should one overhear a man doing so, will not rest till it has killed and eaten the offender!

To deceive the animal, therefore, these people when speaking of a tiger near at hand, invariably allude to it as a jackal—because, being the smallest and most insignificant beast in the forest, they argue that no self-respecting tiger, however prone to take offence, could possibly make any mistake!

Be this as it may—it seemed to us one of the strangest of the many strange superstitions held by natives—being to Western ideas somewhat anomalous, for—as we pointed out to our old man later—to insult a tiger by calling it a jackal was scarcely the best way of propitiating the beast; but, shrugging his shoulders, he merely replied with the usual native formula, "Kya jané" *—but added by way of explanation that "such was their 'dustoor.'†"

This little incident delayed us for some time, but even then we had to use our lantern for the first mile or two of our journey and until the sun had gained sufficient height and power to lighten up the jungle, which—as on the previous day—we found most difficult to negotiate, in fact, the second day's travel was merely a repetition of the first, but the night proved infinitely more exciting. We camped again at sun-down—as near as we could guess—making the same arrangements for our camp as before, and until a couple of hours before dawn, had slept peacefully enough, when a loud rumbling from our elephants

* Who knows. † Custom.

roused us to the knowledge that there was some animal or animals in the vicinity of the camp.

We were not long left in doubt as to the nature of our visitor, for some ten minutes later there rose a deafening chorus of trumpeting and squeals followed by a loud crashing of the jungle as if all the elephants in the forest were advancing in a body, bent on dispossessing us of the portion of their territory which we had annexed.

What the actual number of our invaders amounted to, it was impossible to say in such pitchy darkness, but the forest all around us seemed alive with them, though, as we found afterwards, they were a herd of about thirty which had been frequenting that locality for some days, and apparently in one of their seemingly aimless wanderings, had stumbled upon our camp.

They remained roaming round us for some time—tearing down branches and young trees out of pure mischief—so far as we could judge, for they did not appear to be feeding, but evidently afraid of the light from our many lanterns and the shouts of the men as they swung them about, they fortunately kept at a respectable distance from the encampment.

Nevertheless, the knowledge that we were entirely at their mercy, liable at any moment to be trampled to death, should they suddenly take it into their heads to examine us more closely, kept us in a state of suspense and anxiety not very difficult to imagine. At last after what was probably an hour, but which had seemed to us an age, they departed as suddenly as they had come, going off apparently in single file, as is their wont, for we could only hear the sound as of one animal crashing through the jungle.

It had been certainly an experience, but one that none of us would have cared to go through again, and we were only too thankful that it was a herd and not the rogue that had visited us, for had it been the latter some one in the camp must assuredly have been killed.

As may be imagined, we slept no more that night, consequently made an early start, so that by twelve o'clock were well out of the forest and a couple of hours later reached our camp, to find our tents all ready pitched and

TIFFIN IN THE JUNGLE.

[*To face page* 125.

breakfast awaiting us also—and what pleased us even more, a village watchman with the news that a tiger had killed a bullock only that morning and was lying up with its victim in a large jungle close at hand.

Our first impulse was to go after it at once, but remembering that our elephants and men had done a hard day's work already, we decided to let them rest that day and night. Meanwhile the old "shikari," always somewhat sceptical as to "khubbar" * brought in by outsiders—had carried off the informant to test his information, and if found correct to make arrangements for an early start next day.

The next morning, shortly after daybreak, we mounted our respective howdahs, and with a "khitmagar" † in charge of a substantial "tiffin" basket, on one of the pad elephants, started for the jungle, which proved to be considerably larger than expected. To exploit it thoroughly, therefore, it was necessary to beat it up in sections—a tedious and usually unsatisfactory process unless the tiger happens to be exceptionally short-tempered and takes the initiative itself.

But the one we were seeking was apparently non-militant, for the first beat proved a blank, the second produced a jackal, and the third a civet-cat, which, however, created some excitement for the moment. The "mahout" who first saw it shouted tiger! declaring he could see its tail distinctly; but the indifference exhibited by our elephants soon showed us he was wrong. This mistake, however, was quite excusable, for the tails of the two animals are very similar in appearance. We continued beating for some hours but with no better results, and by mid-day, feeling hungry and dispirited, we decided to have lunch before proceeding with our search. Selecting the banks of a small winding stream, we accordingly dismounted, and were just about to attack the tempting meal our khitmagar had laid out for us, when one of the mahouts who had gone down to the river for a drink came running back, much excited, with the news that close to the edge of the water, and leading into the high grass behind where we sat, were the practically fresh pugs of a huge tiger.

* Information. † Table attendant.

This was, indeed, cheering news, and, as may be imagined, no time was lost in acting on the information. Our depression, hunger, and fatigue vanished as if by magic, and, hastily swallowing a whisky-and-soda, and each pocketing what was nearest him in the way of dry food, we jumped into our howdahs and sending the line along the edge of the river, with directions to beat towards us, we took up our positions at the end of the long grass, which extended to about a quarter of a mile.

No sooner were we posted than the line advanced, and before it had proceeded two hundred yards a loud coughing roar on its right flank announced the tiger's presence, and a few minutes later, the Forest Officer, whose post faced the right of the advancing line, detected the tiger looking steadily at him through a small gap in the grass. He fired at once, hitting him, as we subsequently discovered, in the lower jaw. The tiger acknowledged the shot with a hideous snarl of pain and rage, and, turning sharp to his left, galloped on through the grass, and coming out into lighter cover—seeing my elephant directly in his line—charged straight for me. Aiming low, I fired for his head, but misjudged the pace he was going, and my shot struck him too high up. However, this had the effect of turning him and saving me a nasty tussle, and he disappeared into some heavy grass close behind me before I had time to reload and lift my rifle. The line was now halted, and we took up fresh positions at the far end of the heavy grass.

Soon the beat recommenced, but this time the line had hardly started when suddenly, with a most appalling roar, the tiger, springing almost his full length out of the grass, rushed at the beating elephants, and singling out the one carrying the khitmagar and the tiffin basket, made straight for her. Unfortunately she was the most timid animal of the lot, and seeing the tiger coming at her with open mouth and ruffle on end, turned and ran for all she was worth. Being lightly loaded and a very fast elephant, she seemed to hold her own for a minute or two, but she was no match for a wounded and infuriated tiger bent on revenge, and he was soon up with her ; and now ensued a scene which, though sufficiently amusing for lookers-on, was one of extreme danger to those immediately concerned,

except the tiger himself; for so long as the elephant continued her flight, the tiger would naturally follow, and the headlong pace at which they were going prevented any help being afforded from the guns. The tiffin basket attendant, originally seated behind his basket, had now in his fright scrambled on top of it and sat there, holding on as best he could, in abject terror. Both he and the driver had by this time completely lost their heads; the latter, instead of trying to check his animal, was unconsciously goading her on to swifter flight, and yelling out hysterically that "he was being eaten up and so was his elephant," while from the man behind could occasionally be heard, in trembling accents, "I am gone, too, and so is the tiffin basket."

The last remark struck us as so extremely ludicrous under the circumstances, that, serious as the situation was, we could not help laughing; but we soon realized that it was no laughing matter, and that unless something was done at once some serious fatality was inevitable, for by this time the tiger had seized the elephant by the tail and was apparently trying to scramble up her stern. We now urged our elephants on in pursuit, shouting and yelling at the top of our voices. Just then the fleeing elephant, fortunately, turned at right angles to her course, and gave us an opportunity of firing at the tiger, which we did in a volley. One of the shots evidently took effect, for the tiger, releasing his victim's tail and seeing us near, charged down upon us. We halted to receive him, and my elephant being slightly ahead of the other two, the tiger went straight for him. Having plenty of time, I waited till I thought he was close enough to make certain, and when he was about twelve feet off, fired. The bullet, as we afterwards found, passed through his neck, just escaping the vertebræ, so the shot was neither paralysing nor immediately fatal, and before I could fire again I saw the tiger's head about three feet from me and on a level with my elephant's, and snarling at the "mahout." I was helpless, for the elephant, though an exceptionally steady one, was anything but sweet-tempered, and his rage at feeling the tiger on his trunk and head exceeded anything I have ever witnessed. He squealed, stamped, shook from side

to side, and went through every contortion that an animal is capable of.

Fortunately my friend the magistrate was a cool and experienced sportsman, and as the elephant, tired of the struggle, rested for one instant, he fired, and the tiger fell off dead, shot through the heart. Applying the tape we found him to be a very massive, well-nourished tiger, just over 10 feet 3 inches. To celebrate the occasion, we drank each other's health in the only bottle of soda-water left in the battered tiffin basket intact, then padding our hard-earned trophy, started back for camp.

CHAPTER XVI

READING over the story of the adventure I have just recorded reminds me of a subject I have not as yet touched on, although it is one which has probably given rise to greater controversy—both epistolary and verbal—than any other in connection with big game shooting in India, viz. the size of Indian tigers.

But in spite of the many opinions expressed, and of all statements to the contrary, it is now practically an admitted fact—based on the long experience of trustworthy Anglo-Indian sportsmen—that Indian tigers, whether shot in Bengal, Madras, or Bombay, have seldom exceeded ten feet in length, when stretched to their fullest extent, immediately after death, and measured carefully from tip of nose to tail, all curves included.

However, every rule has its exceptions, and the tiger whose story I am now about to relate was certainly one of them. It was shot in the district of J——, a few months after I had left, and the circumstances attending its destruction are taken from a description given me by the District Officer referred to, who took a prominent part in the proceedings and wrote to me a day or two after while the facts were still fresh in his mind.

For some weeks previous to the expedition which ended in the death of this monster, rumours had reached the district authorities of the existence of an enormous tiger which was said to have taken up his abode in the large Government reserve forest, some twenty miles from the civil station, and to prey on the cattle of the villages living in the immediate vicinity of the forest.

Various attempts had been made to locate and despatch this reputed giant, but hitherto without success, for he either killed and finished his meal at once, without returning

to the remains, or dragged them into dense and impenetrable places where it was impossible to follow him. Hence, though the " kills " were frequent, they could not be utilized as an indication of the tiger's whereabouts at any particular time.

In the meanwhile its ravages continued, and finally became so alarmingly frequent, that it became necessary for the authorities to adopt some special measures to check these depredations.

Two " shikaris " (professional hunters) were accordingly sent out, with a couple of elephants, to scour the forest thoroughly and to tie up some bullocks as baits at places where any traces of a recent " kill " could be discovered, and to report as soon as any of these baits were taken.

In the meantime the District Officer ordered all the elephants at his disposal to be assembled at a certain village within easy distance of the forest in readiness to take the field at a moment's notice.

A week or two went by without any further news of the tiger, and the villagers began to hope that the beast, satiated with the amount of beef it had consumed, had moved away. But they had hoped too soon—for one evening a forest guard, on his way home by a " fire-line," saw what he subsequently described as an eighteen-foot tiger cross the path in front of him.

That same night one of the tied-up bullocks was killed and dragged off into a dense patch of undergrowth into which no one dared to enter. The next morning the " shikaris," when visiting their baits as usual, found one of them missing, the broad track through the high grass into the dense underwood beyond telling its own tale as to what had taken place.

A telegram was despatched at once announcing this " good news," and by four that afternoon the District Officer, Colonel G——, accompanied by the Forest Officer, arrived upon the scene, putting up for the night at a tea planter's bungalow near the railway station.

Soon after sunrise on the following morning, the two officials, accompanied by the manager of the tea garden and his assistant, each mounted on a " howdah " elephant,

started for the jungle, where the beating elephants, some twenty in number, were already assembled.

The howdahs being placed in position, so that each should command a portion of the comparatively open ground between the jungle to be beaten and the one beyond, the beat commenced. The beating elephants had advanced about halfway through the dense cover, when a loud trumpeting and squealing, together with the shouts of the drivers, announced the glad news of the tiger's presence.

A few minutes later, a quick sinuous movement in the grass was observed some twenty yards in front of the left howdah, and presently the head and shoulders of a huge tiger showed for an instant. The next instant, with a roar of defiance and rage at seeing his retreat cut off, he had turned sharp to the left and was galloping through the grass parallel to the howdahs, roaring as he went.

The pace he was travelling at and the close assimilation of his black and yellow markings to the lights and shades of the surrounding jungle, made him anything but an easy target.

He was fired at from each of the three howdahs as he passed them, but held on, evidently untouched, and would have gained the shelter he was seeking, but to do so he was forced to cross a small patch of open, about eighty yards in front of the last howdah. As he reached this spot, G——, who occupied it, and who was probably the safest rifle shot in Bengal, aiming a full length ahead and on the ground line, fired, rolling him over in his tracks. It was a beautiful shot, yet so fast was the tiger going that even with the allowance made, the bullet, as they subsequently discovered, struck well behind the ribs.

Picking himself up at once the tiger stumbled on and, gaining a thick bit of wild plum jungle, disappeared into it. The howdahs were now quickly posted on the further side of this cover, the beating elephants being directed to drive the tiger out to them.

Slowly and cautiously the line advanced, each elephant seeming to scent danger in every clump that lay before him. Shoulder to shoulder, like a moving wall, they gradually made their way, leaving the jungle flat behind them

as they passed. Suddenly a low rumbling as of distant thunder was heard on the right, followed by squeals and trumpeting all along the line.

The next moment, with a roar that could be heard even above the din created by the elephants, the tiger was upon them. The suddenness and ferocity of the attack was more than elephant nature could withstand, and with one accord the " line " turned tail and fled with the tiger in pursuit, biting and clawing any of them he could reach !

But whether too badly wounded to continue the attack, or satisfied with the rout he had accomplished, he soon gave up the chase, and returning to the cover whence he had come, lay up again, showing his rage and disapproval in a series of savage growls.

Again and again was an attempt made to drive him to the howdahs, but always with the same result, till at last all but two of the staunchest of the " line " refused to approach him.

The struggle had continued for about an hour, and as there seemed no immediate prospect of surrender on the tiger's part nor any likelihood of his succumbing to his injuries, it was determined to attack him in his stronghold with the howdah elephants—a fairly perilous undertaking, considering the state of his temper and the position he occupied !

But matters were getting serious, and the sun unpleasantly warm. The howdah elephants and two staunch tuskers aforesaid were accordingly formed into line and advanced cautiously into the cover.

No sooner had they entered than they were greeted by a roar so appalling in its ferocity that the three elephants carrying the Forest Officer and the planters, turned tail and fled incontinently, nor in spite of all threats and inducements could they be persuaded to return to the attack. G—— and the two tuskers were accordingly left to carry on the fight as best they might.

Their position was anything but an enviable one, for the tiger, whether tired out with its previous exertions, or awed by the gleaming tusks and bulky proportions of the tuskers, now changed its tactics, and instead of charging out as before, remained concealed within the

dense cover, its occasional growls alone indicating its whereabouts.

Several attempts were made to force a charge, but without success. Finally one of the tuskers, an exceptionally staunch and powerful animal, was pressed slowly forward till nothing but a few leafy branches lay between it and the tiger. Then, with an indifference almost incredible under the circumstances, it seized, and gently pushed aside the branches with its trunk till a patch of black and yellow stripe was exposed to view.

G——, who had been directing this very dangerous operation, quickly seized his opportunity, and seeing that the tiger still refused to charge, fired a charge of No. 6 into the patch, hoping this might effect a change in the tiger's position, and thus allow of a more certain shot.

The effect was instantaneous, but scarcely in accordance with the wishes or expectations of the sportsman, who had scarcely time to change his shot gun for the rifle, when, with a mighty bound, the tiger sprung fairly on to the elephant's head, and holding on with teeth and claws, remained clinging there !

Fortunately the brave old elephant, in spite of this unwelcome addition to his load, stood like a rock, enabling G—— to take a steady aim at the snarling brute, now literally face to face with him.

The blinding flash and smoke that followed, obstructed his vision for a while, but as the last cleared off he could see the tiger stretched out below him, gasping away the life he had so stubbornly defended to the end.

Lying there, extended to its fullest length, he was a sight to fill any sportsman's heart with joy, and G——, who had shot many a tiger in his time, in fact could count them by the score, gazed with wonder and delight at the huge proportions of the beast.

In the meanwhile the other elephants, thinking the tiger was still in pursuit, could be heard crashing through the jungle in their headlong flight, squealing and trumpeting in their terror. However, the three howdah elephants being really staunch animals, soon recovered from their temporary scare and, yielding to the persuasion of their drivers, returned ready to renew the attack.

But the tiger was now dead, and the sportsmen, all eager to measure the enormous carcass, were soon around it, busy with the tape.

The measuring of a tiger is always an exciting moment, even when the animal appears to be of ordinary dimensions. Imagine then the excitement created by this monster, so obviously a giant of his tribe !

And such in fact he proved to be, for when the measurements were completed, the following were the figures recorded by the tape :—

	Feet.	Inches.
Length from tip of nose to root of tail	7	0
Length of tail	3	7
Total length from tip of nose to end of tail... ...	10	7
Height at shoulder	3	4
Girth	4	8½
Upper arm	2	1
Forearm	1	7½

These measurements were tested with the greatest care, each of the sportsmen taking them in turn. Satisfied at length, though none the less amazed at the huge proportions of the beast, they resolved to weigh it before taking off the skin.

Most of the runaway elephants had returned by now, and the staunchest amongst them being selected was made to kneel beside the body. Two stout ropes were then passed round the tiger's neck and loins, and their ends secured to two of the larger elephants.

As these animals obeyed the order to move forward the huge carcass rose slowly off the ground, and guided by some score or so of the drivers from below was finally placed across the pad of the kneeling elephant.

This patient animal, which had been kept on its knees throughout these lengthy proceedings, was now permitted to rise, and with its heavy and most unwelcome burden, headed the procession to the tea garden adjoining.

On arrival at the factory, the body of the tiger, doubled up as far as possible, was placed on an enormous pair of scales, ordinarily used for weighing tea leaves, and was found to weigh 419 lbs.

Such a weight, considering the length and great bulk of the animal, was so obviously out of all proportion to

SOME OF THE CROWD.

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its size, that it is probable the weights were wrong, or that the scales, which had not been tested for some months, were inaccurate. However, be this as it may, there was certainly no mistake about the measurements, which, if they did not actually constitute a record, could not have been far short of it.

Many "coolies" and others from the adjacent tea garden and villages, had followed the procession to the factory, amongst them several veterans, who, living on the borders of the forest, had seen many a tiger in their time, both alive and dead, and all agreed that this was by far the largest they had ever seen or heard of.

CHAPTER XVII

India might well be described as a land of continual surprises and excitement, for events do certainly seem to succeed each other there with marvellous rapidity, and sometimes with a suddenness more startling than agreeable. Still on the particular morning I am referring to, we had gone through so many exciting moments, chasing —and being chased by—a rhinoceros we had been hunting, that we scarcely expected—nor did we wish for—any further excitement that day.

Nevertheless on our return to camp about midday, we had hardly reached the tents when we were greeted with the startling information that of the two elephants sent to fetch " chárá," or green food for the rest, one of them had blundered into a quicksand, and was stuck hard and fast. To add to the calamity, the elephant in question turned out to be the most valuable animal of the lot—a huge, tuskless male, belonging to the Forest Department, and worth about three thousand rupees.

The scene of the disaster was an open piece of marshland, surrounded by a belt of cane jungle, over two miles from the camp, and hearing that the other elephants, with their mahouts and grass-cutters, were all there, we hurried to the spot to render what aid we could.

We found the poor beast—already buried nearly up to its belly in the bog—trumpeting with terror and swaying from side to side in its frantic efforts to get free, but only to sink deeper with each attempt it made.

The mahouts had divested it of its heavy load of branches, some of which—with the instinct of self-preservation—it had evidently dragged under its feet—while the men had pushed others under its stomach—hoping they would prevent the animal sinking deeper.

But with no solid ground to serve as fulcra, the branches proved of no assistance. Slowly, yet too surely to admit of any doubt, the hapless beast was sinking, inch by inch, its huge stature gradually diminishing in height till at length the surface of the bog was almost on a level with the points of its shoulder blades.

It was pitiable to see the beast—now practically immovable—still making desperate attempts to lift its legs out of the clinging mud which gripped them as tenaciously as the octopus is said to hold its victim—and yet we were powerless to render any aid, for with an animal of this size there was nothing to be done.

The mahouts—under instructions from one of themselves, who had once witnessed a similar disaster—had constructed a roadway out of the branches, by which they had—at great risk to themselves—approached the struggling beast, and fastening a rope round its body, had—with the weight and strength of all the other elephants combined—attempted to draw it out of the bog.

But as well might they have tried to drag a house from its foundations, as to move that unhappy beast from its position where, even if built in with bricks and mortar, it could scarcely have been rendered more immovable, and after trying for a time, they were fain to give up the attempt lest they should tear the unfortunate animal in two.

Meanwhile it continued sinking steadily, and should the bog prove to be much deeper, must soon, we knew, be completely engulfed, to meet a lingering death from suffocation, too painful to contemplate much more to witness.

Already the strain of watching the poor brute's agonizing struggles, without being able to relieve them, was telling on our nerves, and presently as the beast—now realizing the imminence of its danger—gave expression to its feelings in piteous moans of anguish, we could bear the scene no longer, and, as all hope of rescue was now over, decided to end the animal's sufferings with a bullet.

The question now arose as to who should should be the executioner, since to kill an elephant mercifully, or

in other words, instantaneously, requires no little knowledge of its anatomy, for although—as in other animals—the brain and heart are the two vital organs, it is by no means easy for the ordinary individual to locate either in an elephant.

The Forest Officer was the only one amongst us possessing sufficient knowledge for the task, but we could not persuade him to accept it, for it happened he had known the animal many years, and was much attached to it by old associations. However, it was now evident that if we were to save it from a lingering death, there was no time to be lost—for in another half-hour or so it would be, obviously, too late. Stimulated by this knowledge G——, the magistrate, always prompt to take action, now came forward.

"I have never shot an elephant before," he said, addressing the other, "but if you tell me where the bullet should be placed, I will do the best I can"—a speech characteristic of the modesty of the man, who, as we knew, could hit a rupee at eighty yards more easily than most men could at ten.

Meanwhile he had taken his rifle off the elephant, and, throwing the breech open, was about to insert the cartridges, when he remembered they were loaded with hollow express bullets, and that he had no others with him—nor could he borrow any from us, as he knew that ours, too, were of the same description, for, knowing the danger of using solid bullets near a crowd, we had all, when starting from camp, been careful to take none with us.

Emptying all our pockets, we examined every cartridge we possessed, on the chance of one with solid bullet having been put in by mistake. Unfortunately, we were all too careful sportsmen to mix our ammunition, and not one could be found with which to end the poor brute's sufferings—now most harrowing to witness.

Driven to desperation at the sight, we had almost decided to use the hollow bullets, when at this moment a native passed along the road behind us riding on a pony.

"The very thing, by heavens," cried K——, the Forest Officer, jumping up excitedly; and while I was still wondering what he meant, G——, who had grasped his meaning,

had dislodged the astonished native from his steed, and mounting it himself, was galloping to the bungalow as hard as the little animal could lay legs to the ground.

"Bring the steel-tipped-bullet ones," cried the former, shouting after him, for he guessed from his prompt action, that G—— had understood him, and was off to fetch the cartridges. "Pray Heaven, he may be back in time," he added, looking anxiously at the elephant, which—though now too firmly fixed to struggle—kept raising its trunk continually as if to help its breathing.

Nevertheless, it appeared to us that the fore part of its body and the head seemed now to be gradually rising higher while the hinder portion was, as palpably, sinking lower every moment till it was completely submerged, leaving the animal, to all appearances, standing half erect, in which position it remained.

There seemed now every prospect of the animal surviving till the cartridges arrived, and thus being saved the tortures of death from suffocation; but, alas! the fates were against it, for, presently, to our horror, we saw the head drop slowly forward till it reached the level of the bog, then, suddenly sink into it till there was nothing visible but the trunk, which—protruding some two feet above the surface—showed by the expansion and contraction of the nostrils, the efforts the unhappy animal was making to respire.

The strange, half-erect position the body had assumed was now fully explained, for the hind-quarters of an elephant —being the heavier portion—had been imperceptibly sinking faster, while the rest, kept up for a time by the density of the bog, had, according to the natural laws of gravitation, finally sunk to the same level.

Thus, with the grim irony of fate, the animal was now standing on solid ground—barely six inches more than its own height from the surface, and yet, for all the assistance we could render, it was as hopelessly engulfed as if buried a thousand feet below the level of the bog.

Hence, what we had feared—but hoped to have averted —had actually come to pass, and even worse, for there was now an added horror to the situation from the fact of the trunk being left above the surface—to feed the lungs

with air, and thus prolong the poor brute's life, and consequently its mental and bodily torture.

In the meantime, G—— had returned with the cartridges, having made the double journey—about five miles—in less than half an hour, but alas! had arrived just five minutes too late. Nevertheless, an effort had been made to use the bullets, and strangely enough, by K——, who —now ignoring his own feelings in his anxiety to end the animal's misery—had gone out on the branches, and, at the risk of being himself engulfed, tried, by boring through the bog, to make a passage down to the head.

But he soon found that this was as impossible as digging a well in sand, and after a while had to abandon the attempt, when the mahout before mentioned, who had already tried to convince him of the hopelessness of his efforts and the risk attending on them, now suggested another plan, which, though it sounded most inhuman, was, in fact, the most humane.

"It is impossible to shoot the beast now, sahib," he urged, "and if left to itself it may live for many hours yet; it would be better, then, to try and bury its trunk beneath the mud, when—no longer able to draw breath —it must quickly die."

We could not but admit that he was right, still to kill an animal deliberately by suffocation seemed too cruel, and yet we could not leave it to linger on in agony, for—as the old man had implied—so long as its trunk remained above the surface, it might live for many hours, possibly throughout the night.

It was obviously necessary, therefore, that, however repugnant it might be to our feelings, the old mahout's proposition should be carried out at once. Having come to this decision, the Forest Officer—who as head of the department was responsible to Government for the loss—reluctantly gave his consent.

"Very well, Pir Bux," he said, striving hard to control his emotion. "Do as you suggest, but for Heaven's sake let it be done quickly, and under your own supervision," then turning away to conceal the tears that I could see stealing down his cheek, he mounted his elephant and hurried from the scene.

The old man did not reply, but from the determined expression on his features, as he set about his gruesome task, at once, we could see that he meant obeying his old master's instructions to the letter. Calling on three of the older and more experienced mahouts to assist him, they quickly added some more branches, and in an incredibly short time had made the platform strong enough for the awful work they had to do.

How the last dread act was eventually accomplished, we happily did not hear till all was over, for, being unable to relieve the poor beast's suffering, we had, naturally, no desire to witness its sad ending. Accordingly, mounting our respective animals, we left before the men commenced their ghastly task.

We heard the details later from Pir Bux, who—anxious to show that he had carried out his orders, faithfully—described the scene, but too graphically to admit of repetition. Suffice it, then, to say that he had evidently performed his painful duty as expeditiously and humanely as in the circumstances was possible.

Thus ended the most tragic and painful incident it has ever been my lot to be engaged in, and if I make no apology for having described it at such length, it is only because a calamity of this kind is, happily, so rare that a description may prove of interest as being one of the comparatively unknown perils to which sportsmen, hunting big game on elephants, are liable to be exposed. For quicksands are frequently encountered when out shooting, not only in crossing rivers, but as often in the depths of the vast jungles, where—unseen and unsuspected—they are most to be feared, and that accidents are rare is due entirely to the sagacity of the elephants, whose instincts, as a rule, warn them and their riders of the danger.

In the present case, however, the bog happened to have been masked by a fringe of thick jungle, and the animal, tired and heavily burdened, and probably relying on its grass-cutter for guidance, had neglected its customary caution, with the result that it had blundered blindly into it, and sliding downwards at once, was embedded before it had time to withdraw.

Unfortunately, too, the bog was of the drier—hence

more dangerous—variety, which, while it swallows its victims less rapidly, is infinitely more tenacious than the comparatively liquid quicksand usually to be met with on the shores of Indian streams and rivers, where the generally strong currents, continually penetrating through the sand, tend to destroy the cohesive element it contains. In ordinary quicksands such as these, elephants, when crossing rivers, are occasionally bemired; but if taken in time are, as a rule, released with comparative ease.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE harrowing scene we had witnessed made a great impression on our minds, as was only natural, and that night our conversation round the camp-fire, after dinner, so far from being of the cheery, sporting nature we usually indulged in at this hour, was probably one of the most doleful ever heard in a shooting camp, for having discussed the painful subject uppermost in our thoughts, we drifted into stories of every gruesome incident each had ever heard of.

In this lugubrious competition, the District Officer came off an easy winner, for a more weird or blood-curdling story than the one he told us would be difficult to imagine, and though almost beyond belief, was yet so strange and interesting that I carefully recorded it.

"It was New Year's Eve," he began, "about ten years ago, that I and three other men, including one Major B——, our policeman, having determined to see the Old Year out, one of us suggested telling stories to keep ourselves awake.

"I had just finished an exciting tale of an adventure with a bison, and the other two, having already told their stories, were as keen as myself to extract one from the Major.

"The individual referred to was a tall, gaunt, war-worn warrior who had seen much service in the Mutiny, and after that was over, had joined the new police force, and was now the police-officer of the district in which I and the other two officials were then stationed.

"Being considerably the senior in age, and with more experience of the country than myself or either of the others, a story from him was awaited with anxious expectation, but he seemed strangely disinclined to tell it,

although it was evident from his manner that he had one to tell.

"'Well, you fellows,' he exclaimed at length, 'I will tell you a story since you insist on it, but I warn you beforehand that none of you will believe it, nor be able to solve the mystery it contains, any more than I can, and I have tried for years.'

"With this preface, which naturally increased the curiosity of his audience, he refilled his old battered meerschaum, and lighting it very carefully, commenced this weird and extraordinary tale.

"'Towards the close of the year 1858,' he began, 'being then quartered at one of the hill stations in Bengal, I was living with two others, in a furnished house we had rented, an old tumble-down affair, standing by itself, on the summit of a hill. It was a one-storied, double-fronted building, with a broad passage running down the centre, and a large verandah on three sides, on the same level as the rooms, and overhead, between the ceiling and the roof, was a high loft extending over all five rooms.

"'The room with which my story is particularly concerned was a spare one, at the back of the house, with the door opening into the passage, and two large windows looking on to the verandah. These windows opened inwards, and were protected by wooden shutters, which were always closed at night. Some three weeks after we had moved into the house, we had a visitor from the plains, a young nephew of mine named Morton, who had come up for a change, and thinking he might feel lonely or nervous in this comparatively isolated room, I suggested he should occupy a small one next mine. However, the youngster, being an extremely matter-of-fact individual, utterly devoid of any nervous fancies, laughed at the idea of being lonely, and was accordingly put into the room.

"'Some days passed, and although at times our visitor appeared at breakfast pale and somewhat distrait, he made no complaints, till one morning he seemed so thoroughly upset and agitated that I could not help remarking on it, when, after much persuasion, he admitted he had passed most restless nights, being always kept awake by what he thought was the night-watchman, walking up and down

the verandah in heavy shoes. Believing our ponies in the stables near to have been the cause of this disturbance, we had them removed at once to other stalls, lower down the hill, where their movements could not possibly be heard from the house.

"'The next morning, however, much to our surprise, he again complained of the tramping in the verandah, and, still under the impression the night-watchman was the culprit, asked that he might be told to patrol outside.

"'Now, as it happened, no night-watchman was employed by us, hence we were naturally much puzzled to account for the continuance of the noise, after the removal of the ponies, but fearing to alarm the boy, said nothing to him about this, and merely told him we would make further inquiries at once. He thanked us, and before the day was over, appeared to have forgotten all about the matter, and quite recovered his usual spirits, laughingly observing as he was going off to bed, that " if that blessed watchman commenced his pranks again, he would plug him with a new catapult he had made."

"'It was about ten o'clock, and the next hour or two went quickly by, the stillness of the night being only occasionally broken by the howling of the jackals, when suddenly an appalling shriek was heard, and the next moment Morton's door was violently thrown open, and he rushed screaming down the passage into my room, evidently under the influence of some awful terror. Shortly afterwards my two chums, awakened by the noise, came in too, and together we tried to soothe him, but it was some time before he was sufficiently collected to speak, and when at length able to do so, he told us what had happened.

"'It appeared that he had been lying in bed, reading for about an hour, when again the tramping in the verandah suddenly commenced, and determined this time to find out what it was, jumped out of bed to look.

"'Going up to one of the windows, he pushed aside the curtain and saw what seemed to him the faint outlines of a face, peering into the room; unfastening the window, he pushed it open, when to his amazement he discovered that in addition to the glass there were heavy wooden shutters, securely fastened from inside!

"'Meanwhile the face was still there, and growing rapidly more distinct, till he could see it was that of a European, with the eyes wide open, staring over and behind him, in the direction of the bedstead beyond, and before he had time to realize the full meaning of this extraordinary phenomenon, a sound as of some one sighing deeply was heard close behind him.

"'In a moment all the events of the preceding nights flashed across his mind, lending additional terror to the object now before him, and feeling convinced it was something supernatural, he had fled screaming from the room. As he concluded his weird story, told with a clearness and circumstantiality unpleasantly convincing, we resolved to investigate the matter thoroughly next day, meanwhile making up a camp-bed for Morton in my room, for nothing could induce him to go back to his own.

"'Next morning we searched the house from top to bottom, including the loft, every nook and corner of which was carefully overhauled, with the aid of lanterns, but, as might be supposed, found nothing which would in any way account for the strange events described.

"'In the course of the next few days, we questioned several people living in the neighbourhood, but none of them could throw any light upon the subject. Finally, we locked up the spare room, and having our work and other things to interest us, the incident soon passed out of our minds. But it was not so with our visitor, on whom the matter had evidently made a deep impression, as we could see from his constantly recurring to the subject and the marked change in his manner.

"'At length one morning, some three weeks or so after, much to our surprise, he proposed that we should all sit up one night, in what was now called the haunted room. Then, perhaps, we might discover some solution of the mystery, as he apparently still considered it.

"'His proposal met with unanimous approval, not that we imagined anything would come of it, for we had by this time arrived at the conclusion that our friend had been the victim of a nightmare or of some passing fantasy of the brain; but believing as we did that there was no mystery to be solved, we were confident nothing would

be seen, and hoped that he would then think no more about the matter.

"'Accordingly, the next night, after dinner and a smoke, we adjourned to the "haunted chamber," and lighting it up brilliantly, searched it again; and then locking the door and seeing the shutters were all closed and barred, extinguished all the lights and took up our positions with our backs to the only door.

"'Seated as we were, we faced the dead-wall at the far end of the room where, in the left-hand corner, stood the bedstead up against the wall, the windows being on our right, and the verandah beyond them. We had sat, watching in silence, for a couple of hours or more, but finding it too great a strain, commenced talking in whispers which gradually became insensibly louder, and were soon discussing subjects quite unconnected with our present purpose, which seemed to be forgotten.

"'The clock in the passage had just struck eleven, and all of us feeling sleepy, some one was suggesting our going to bed, when suddenly a loud thumping, as of feet clad in heavy boots, was heard in the verandah, coming in our direction.

"'Reaching the door they stopped, but the next moment were heard again, seemingly inside the room, going towards the bedstead, then ceased again, and a second or two later there came the sound as of a deep sigh or groan. Meanwhile I had been trying to strike a match, but in my hurry and excitement dropped the box, and leaning down to pick it up, was groping in the dark, when one of my companions cried out—

"'"Good Heavens! What is that?"

"'I looked up at once, and there, in front of me, but somewhat to my left, was a circle of bright light, and within it, showing faintly, the outlines of a face, which, from its position, I judged to be just above the bedstead.

"'I tried to cry out, but my voice seemed paralysed for the time, my companions, too, were silent, though I guessed from their deep breathing that they too had seen this extraordinary apparition, and were apparently as terror-stricken as myself. As I sat gazing in horrified amazement, without power of speech or action, the features on

the face gradually grew clearer, till I could tell they were those of a European, such as Morton had described, but with the eyes now looking downwards.

"'Presently, the circle of light assumed an oval form, and now, beneath the face, appeared the outline of the neck, which as it took more shape showed a crimson streak across it, faintly at first and then dark red, till, to my horror, I saw it was a gash upon the throat, extending from ear to ear!

"'What further terrible development might have taken place it is impossible to say, for, at this moment, an appalling shriek was heard, and the next instant the door behind us was burst open—flooding the room with light from the wall-lamps in the passage.

"'The shriek had come from Morton, who happened to be seated near the door, and it was he who had burst it open in his panic-stricken anxiety to fly from that awful presence into the passage, where we found him looking like one demented.

"'The other two and myself, although much older and possibly less susceptible to fear, were nevertheless in but little better condition, for the awful scene we had witnessed was one to try the strongest nerve.

"'As may easily be imagined, none of us entered the room again that night, but, piling a table and some boxes against the broken door, passed the hours till daylight discussing the adventure in my room, at the far end of the house.

"'The conclusion we arrived at was that the bedstead must in some way be connected with the mystery. Accordingly, the next morning, with the courage born of daylight, we took this ancient piece of furniture to pieces; but finding nothing to justify our theory, had it removed to the loft.

"'Morton, I need hardly say, did not assist in the investigation, declining absolutely to enter the room again; in fact, he left us that day to return to his station, preferring to cut short his visit to passing another night within that house.

"'He told us before he left, that looking back to all he had gone through, he wondered that he had the courage to continue sleeping in that room, for although up to the

previous night, he had tried to believe that all he had seen and heard was due to natural causes, he had always felt there was something strange and mysterious taking place.

"'We never used his room again, and left the house ourselves shortly afterwards, for during the last few days we remained in it after he had gone, we used to hear strange noises in the loft, and once or twice, happening to be awake between the hours of eleven and twelve, I heard the sound of those awful footsteps tramping loudly overhead.

"'The mystery was never solved, so far as I am aware, but some five years later, long after I had left that station, I was once going home on furlough, and amongst the passengers in the steamer, was an old planter and his wife, who had lived at one time in the district.

"'I got to know them later, and in course of conversation discovered that many years ago they had shared that house with some friends—another married couple—who had occupied that particular room, and of whom—before knowing anything of my story—they told me this sad tale.

"'It appeared that their friend was also a tea planter, employed on a "garden" in the plains, but he used to come up occasionally for week-ends. Once during his absence his wife was taken seriously ill, and before he could be summoned, died suddenly during the night.

"'The next evening the husband, returning quite unexpectedly, having heard nothing of his wife's illness, much less of her death, was riding quietly up to the house when he met the funeral procession coming down the hill!

"'Strangely enough the awful suddenness of the blow seemed to have no immediate effect, for although stunned for the moment, he appeared to recover, and was able to follow the body to the grave, but on his returning to the house his friends could see that his mind was evidently paralysed from the shock.

"'They did their best to console him, but refusing to be comforted he begged to be left alone, and went out on to the verandah, where they heard him tramping up and down dressed as he was, and with heavy riding boots on, till late into the night.

"'At length, about eleven o'clock, being persuaded to

come in, he lay down upon the bed, and promising he would try to get some sleep, they left him for the night, feeling that a good night's rest would be the best thing for him.

"'However, the next morning, his servant going into the room with the early-morning tea, was horrified to find his master lying dead in bed with his throat cut from ear to ear, and his hand still grasping the razor that he had used.

"'Now, had I heard this story before witnessing the terrible scenes I have described, I might perhaps, in time, have come to look upon the latter as some freak of my imagination; but now I was more puzzled than ever, for sceptical as I am as to supernatural happenings, I could not well ignore the extraordinary connection between what I had seen and this previous tragedy enacted in that room!

"'But, as I said before, the mystery still remains unsolved, and must remain so to the end, for no light can now be thrown upon it, and now—good night! for it's time we were in bed.'

"Concluding his story with these words, the Major rose abruptly and, evidently unwilling to discuss the subject further, retired into his tent. We all agreed that his was quite the best story, but, as he had himself announced, one somewhat difficult to believe, except by one of the audience who, as it happened, had once spent his leave at that hill station many years before.* He said he had often heard the story, and moreover, had met a man there who had lived in the house, and had been disturbed at nights by what seemed to be the sound of some one tramping up and down the verandah."

* Note by the Author.—I have been at this hill station myself and have seen the house, which, many years ago, used to be known as the "Haunted House"!

MY "MACHAN."

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CHAPTER XIX

THE elephant's tragic ending cast quite a gloom over the camp, and by the "mahouts" and their assistants was evidently regarded as an evil omen, which, so far as it concerned our shooting, was unfortunately verified, for during the next few weeks not a single expedition ended in success. However, as by the time our tour was over the hot weather had set in, we had fortunately no further opportunity of testing this prediction; though, if an unusually unhealthy and generally unpleasant hot and rainy season formed part of the prophecy, it was certainly fulfilled.

* * * * *

The cold season had come round again, and I had been already out on tour a month or so, when my duties took me to a part of the district where there were said to be some bison; but with the usual ups and downs of luck in sport, the herd, as I discovered later, had left these jungles the day before I came.

However, being ignorant of this at the time, I hunted diligently for them on an elephant for a day or two, then being told they had a favourite feeding ground where they came to graze late in the evenings, I conceived what in my ignorance I imagined to be a brilliant idea, of erecting a "machan" concealed in the jungle near this feeding place, and watching for them on it!

I knew nothing in those days of the habits of these animals or of their extraordinary power of scenting human beings, but had heard that their sight was dull and limited, and as my old "shikari" was not in camp with me at the time—nor anyone else bold enough to tell the sahib that he was wrong—I proceeded in all seriousness to carry out my idiotic plan.

For two long afternoons till dusk, I had sat in solemn silence, expecting every moment to see the beasts emerge from the forest into the strip of open I commanded, though as well might I have expected to see a hippopotamus come out and dance a hornpipe; but on the third evening—a couple of hours before sunset—just as I had made up my mind to another disappointment, I heard a loud crashing in the jungle as of some large animals coming towards me.

At last! thought I, my efforts are about to be rewarded, and with every nerve in my body tingling with excitement, I brought the hammers of my rifle noiselessly to full cock, and with my eyes riveted on the jungle, waited further developments. A moment or two later the head of an animal appeared through the tangled brushwood—then another and another, till some twenty large beasts had emerged into the open.

But with the first that had showed itself completely, my interest in them had ceased, for I had recognized the hideous misshapen head and long, low, ugly body of the domesticated buffalo—a herd of these half-tamed creatures had apparently been wandering about the jungle all the day, as is their habit, and now that night was approaching were slowly wending their way homewards to the village they belonged to, as they generally do at nightfall.

I watched them lumbering down the glade with feelings not very difficult to imagine, and muttered observations not very flattering to their species, and was about to fire off my rifle—the signal for my elephant to fetch me—when my attention was attracted to two round, curious-looking objects, close together, but half concealed within the jungle some hundred yards ahead of the retreating buffalo. Putting up my glasses, I found to my amazement that they were the heads belonging to a brace of tigers, which, from their eyes being fixed upon the buffalo, were evidently contemplating an attack on them while the latter were seemingly quite unconscious of their presence.

But to understand what followed, it is necessary to describe the formation of the jungle and its position with reference to the glade, or opening, already mentioned.

To explain briefly, then—the jungle was about a mile in length, and perhaps half that distance in width and divided into two blocks by this comparatively open glade, some thirty yards wide, one end leading out into the plain beyond, while at the other was a kind of *cul de sac* formed by the jungle closing in again, and it was at this spot, just within the jungle, that my "machan" had been erected; thus—without being visible myself—I commanded the whole length of the opening so far as the eye could see.

The two tigers were in the piece of jungle to my left, but as I was watching them, one suddenly disappeared, and some five minutes later, I caught sight of it for an instant peering out of the opposite cover!—having evidently crossed over through the heavy jungle behind me, as I must otherwise have seen it crossing.

Meanwhile the buffalo—apparently finding the grass in the glade to their liking—had stopped and commenced grazing, when suddenly, from the spot where I had first seen them, out rushed a tiger with a roar so loud and terrifying that the buffalo, taken completely unawares, seemed quite demoralized for the moment, and before they had time to recover and assume their ordinary defensive attitude,* the tiger in the opposite cover—where it had lain concealed—now attacked them too!

The scene that now followed is almost impossible to describe—not only because of the rapidity with which it was enacted, but in the confusion that ensued it was difficult to follow the sequence in which the events took place.

The buffalo, notwithstanding the unexpected second attack, made some attempt to concentrate, but the tigers were too quick for them, the first had already seized its victim, and having brought it to the ground, was biting at its throat, while the second, without a moment's hesitation, sprang upon another, and seizing it by the neck with teeth and claws, seemed to kill it instantaneously; but this was the extent of their ravages, for the herd had at length succeeded in packing together, presenting a

* A herd of buffalo when attacked by a tiger, generally—if they have time—form themselves into a square, and usually succeed in driving the beast off, and sometimes even kill it.—AUTHOR.

formidable array of lowered heads and pointed horns against which no soft-skinned animal like a tiger could possibly prevail, nor did they attempt to, but, growling savagely the while, confined their attentions to the two they had killed. At this stage of the proceedings, however, the sportsman's natural longing to fire at the tigers, which I had hitherto controlled, proved too strong for me, and although the animals were almost out of range, I foolishly yielded, firing at the larger animal of the two. I saw the bullet strike the ground some twenty feet in front of it, and the second shot only tended to convince me of my folly, for following so closely on the other it completely scared the tigers, as I could tell from their making off at a gallop—crashing noisily through the jungle instead of in their usual noiseless, stealthy manner.

" That is the last I shall see of them," was my melancholy reflection as they disappeared into the cover. However, there was some consolation in the thought that I had seen a sight few sportsmen have ever had the luck to witness. Half an hour later my elephant arrived in answer to the firing, and clambering on to the pad from my perch we started for the camp.

Our route lay through the glade, and as we passed the carcasses of the two buffalo, the " mahout," who, like most of his kind, was something of a sportsman, suggested that I should sit up over them that night on a tree which happened to be close by. But I was evidently fated to do nothing right that day, for—as the sequel will show—had I taken his advice I might probably have added both these tigers to my list. But feeling tired and disgusted with the ill luck that had pursued me all day, and convinced, moreover, that after being fired at so recently, the tigers would not return that night, I refused, and on arriving at the camp, found some important work awaiting me which fully occupied my time and thoughts till past midnight. Next morning, however, while at breakfast, I was informed that one of the headmen of the village wished to see me. He proved to be the owner of the herd on which the tigers had levied toll, and had a curious and interesting—although to me somewhat tantalising—experience to relate.

It appeared that hearing of the occurrence from my

"mahout," and being the proud possessor of a long, single-barrel, gas-pipe-like gun, he had resolved to wreak immediate vengeance on the destroyers of his cattle. Accompanied by a posse of his co-villagers, he had accordingly set out that night to the scene of the disaster, and selecting a convenient tree, ensconced himself on one of its branches, where his escort left him.

Here—in some discomfort but comparative security—with his antiquated weapon loaded almost to the muzzle with a miscellaneous collection of projectiles, and a lantern suspended on a branch over the carcasses, he had been sitting till midnight, half asleep, when he was roused by a rustling in the jungle below him.

Presently, two long, shadowy forms emerged into the circle of light cast by the lantern, and stood gazing up at it with evident suspicion, but before the author of this ingenious device had time to bring his unwieldy weapon into a position likely to damage anyone but himself, the tigers—for such they proved to be—evidently satisfied that the strange-looking thing dangling from the tree was in some way responsible for this unnatural and objectionable illumination, sprang up at it, striking savagely with their paws, till not a vestige of the light was left—or much of the lantern.

This sudden and unlooked-for behaviour of the tigers so terrified the hapless sportsman on the tree that relinquishing all designs upon them—as in fact he was compelled to do in the absence of any light—he now confined his attentions to improving the safety of his position by groping his way higher up into the branches, where he remained in abject terror and considerable discomfort, till the morning, when his friends returned as arranged.

Meanwhile, as he went on to inform me, the tigers, after extinguishing the light, had commenced their feast off the buffalo, and the sound of skin and flesh being torn and crunching of bones continued for some hours adding considerably to the terrifying feelings he experienced till the coming dawn relieved him of their presence.

Such was the story he related of his strange and, as I thought at the time, so improbable an adventure, that I was inclined to believe he had trumped up the tale to

curry favour, and accordingly asked him, by way of cross-examination, whether he had brought the lantern back with him?

"No, sahib," he replied, quite naturally; "of what use would it be to me since it is broken in pieces—and even the box that holds the oil, bitten through and through?"

This was circumstantial evidence with a vengeance, but to test his story further, I inquired if he had noticed how much of the buffalo had been devoured? To which he answered that all the flesh of one was gone, but the other seemed intact.

Being now furnished with sufficient facts, I resolved to test them personally by a local investigation. "Very well, Gopal Chand," I said, for such he had told me was his name, "you must now accompany me to the place, and if all you say is true, I will sit up myself to-night."

He seemed quite pleased to go, and an hour later I was *en route*, with him seated behind me on the extreme edge of the pad, evidently much abashed to find himself sitting, not only in the presence of, but on the same level as a sahib!

From what I found on arrival it was quite evident that the tigers had been there again—and to some purpose. Of the two buffaloes I had seen killed, one was almost entirely eaten, and as to the lantern, pieces of it were scattered here and there, and the reservoir had holes in it undoubtedly made by a tiger's teeth; while a portion of the cord by which the light had been suspended was still there and under it the grass was all disturbed and trodden down.

But whether the tigers would come back that night again was now the question. However, as there was one of the buffaloes still untouched, it seemed possible; at any rate, I decided to take my chance, my sporting friend Gopal undertaking to have constructed for me a comfortable watch-post on the tree he had occupied himself.

I came out there accordingly, after an early dinner, but, to make a long story short, although I remained awake all night, the only result of my long vigil was a dose of fever the next day; for except for a brace of jackals —a sure sign that the tigers had departed—not an animal

of any sort visited the kills. Nevertheless, in spite of my double disappointment, first with the bison and then the tigers, I came to the conclusion that although I had failed in both cases, the sight I had witnessed more than made up for it, to say nothing of the experience I had gained —experience which in later years stood me in good stead.

The next day but one—having recovered from the effects of my night's exposure—I returned for a time to the station, and for the remainder of that particular cold season was too busily occupied with my more legitimate duties to devote much time to sport, nor did I experience any adventures of sufficient interest to be recorded in the diary I kept for such occurrences.

I had now been many years in India without taking any but occasional short periods of leave, and was beginning, like all Anglo-Indians, to feel the want of a thorough change of climate and ideas. Accordingly when the hot season was again approaching, I obtained six months' furlough, but as my finances would not admit of the expensive journeys home and back, decided to spend my holidays in the hills, where I proceeded in due course.

CHAPTER XX

I HAD selected the hills of Travancore, in the Presidency of Madras, as the most suitable spot wherein to spend my leave—firstly, because I had a planter friend there with whom I could chum; the second reason was that never having been in that part of India before, it would be a more complete change for me; the last, though not the least important reason, being that I had heard there was good bison and ibex shooting to be had there.

My friend was not a sportsman himself, but this fact, so far from being a drawback, was considerably in my favour from the sporting point of view, as the game in his immediate neighbourhood, not having been disturbed for some years, was consequently less shy and easier to approach. Moreover, though not a sportsman in the sense of actually shooting himself, he knew all the best shikaris and the varieties of animals to be found in the district.

Amongst the latter he included, much to my surprise, the ordinary Bengal tiger, a beast I had hitherto imagined was to be found only in the plains. He admitted they were rare, and difficult to get at owing to the nature of the country, but added that on several occasions cattle belonging to the estate had been killed by them, and that one had recently been shot by a "shikari."

From the moment I learnt of the existence of these beasts, bison, ibex, and sambhur ceased to have any interest for me, for unlike some, probably most, Anglo-Indian sportsmen, tiger, leopard, and bear—in the order named—were the only animals that I really cared to hunt, or which afforded me any genuine satisfaction to kill; possibly because of the greater excitement derived from their pursuit.

However, be this as it may, I had not been many days

TEA GARDEN COOLIES.

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with my friend before I commenced making inquiries, worrying him and every member of his staff to tell me where a tiger was likely to be found, till they must have wished that I could find one which would remove me from their midst.

There was not a " shikari " in the neighbourhood nor a " coolie " on the garden that I had not pestered with inquiries, nor yet a jungle within five miles of me in which I had not sat up half the night over a half-starved bullock which I dragged from place to place, till it died from the unwonted exercise.

But all to no purpose, and for the very simple reason that there was not a tiger in the place. However, I continued my endeavours, all except the bullock, which the state of my finances did not admit of my replacing, until convinced at last that even in India there could be jungles without tigers, I transferred my attention to the leopard.

Of these I knew there were plenty, for often in the night, I had heard them grunting round my bungalow, a sound I had first mistaken for some one sawing wood, but was shortly undeceived, for being woke up by it one morning, I missed my dog, and later in the day found its head and a few scattered bones behind the coolie lines. From that day forth I thought no more of tigers, for the dog had been a favourite one, and I was determined to avenge it.

I lost no time in starting my crusade, both coolie and " shikari " now willingly assisting, as the leopard is a beast at once dreaded and detested by natives of all classes, and with good reason, for a more persistent destroyer of cattle it would be difficult to imagine, while should one take to man-eating, he is more dangerous than a tiger.

To detail the various measures I adopted for the destruction of the beast would occupy more space than I can spare ; suffice it, then, to say that every method was employed which human ingenuity could devise, but with no tangible results, except that while engaged in these experiments, an incident occurred which led to my introduction to the bison.

Early one morning I was returning from one of my many all-night vigils on a tree, when the " shikari " who accompanied me pointed to something on the ground.

"What is it?" I asked, too sleepy to care, yet hoping it might be the fresh track of a leopard. "Bison, sahib," he replied, using the local name, which for the moment has escaped me. I looked, and there, impressed deeply in some mud, were what appeared to me the hoof marks of a bullock.

Now I had been told that bison sometimes visited the neighbourhood, but having heard of none since my arrival, had come to regard the information as one of the legendary traditions of the place. However, as the evidence before me seemed conclusive, and the "shikari" declared the tracks to be quite fresh, my interest was aroused, and every other beast I had seen or heard of now sank into insignificance.

On my arrival at the bungalow, I was met by my "factotum," in other words, my "boy," who, despite his sixty years, still retained this youthful title, and who amongst his many self-claimed virtues possessed some sporting instincts.

This, I may mention, was the only bond between us, for in other respects we held some differences of opinion, more especially in the matter of my whisky and cheroots, regarding which his views were decidedly socialistic. At some period of his existence he had possibly owned a name and probably a caste, but both had long since been abandoned, and now, as he informed me, "he was same like caste as master," meaning to imply thereby that he, too, was a Christian.

But to come back to my story. As I entered the bungalow I could see from the old "boy's" face that he had something important to impart, and on coming in later with my tea, he told me he had just seen some bison on a certain hill a little distance off.

"But how do you know they were bison?" I inquired, wondering how he could have seen them since the hill itself was not visible from the bungalow.

"I see them myself, four cows and one bull-cow," he replied promptly, never at a loss for details if he thought they would be welcome, an accomplishment common to most natives.

In this particular instance, however, the information

was fairly accurate, as he had just obtained it from a coolie, whom I questioned shortly afterwards, and who had seen the animals while on his way to " muster."

As I could no longer doubt the beasts were there, I determined to follow them up as soon as possible, but knowing the climb would be a stiff one, I sent one of my ponies half-way on; and an hour later followed on the other, the horsekeeper trotting behind me with my rifle.

Although the hill itself was barely three miles from the bungalow, to reach its summit, it was necessary to traverse more than twice that distance, the greater part of it by a winding, stony path, little better than a goat track. I found the second pony at the bottom of the hill, and transferring the saddle to it, commenced the steep ascent.

An hour of steady climbing brought us near the top. Afraid to go further, I dismounted, and leaving the pony with the horsekeeper, crept cautiously along on foot. But in spite of all my care, I had apparently been too noisy, for as I reached the summit, and had raised my head on a level with the plateau, the last bison of the herd was disappearing into the jungle.

It was useless to attempt following them, for the cover was too dense to allow of noiseless stalking; I accordingly dropped back to the pony, and taking charge of it myself, sent the horsekeeper off to a neighbouring village, which commanded a spot where the jungle ended, to watch, and if the animals emerged, to report to me at once.

About three-quarters of an hour later, he came running back to say that the herd had just left the jungle and were grazing in the valley, about half a mile below; this was the very thing I had hoped for, and as the valley in question lay between two jungles; by making a detour, I could approach them from the other side, where the cover seemed very light and the wind all in my favour.

Instructing the horsekeeper to remain with the pony, I took the rifle from him, and keeping to my right, crossed the valley a long way further down, and thus gained the opposite cover at a spot which I had calculated would be about a quarter of a mile from the herd. But although the valley stretched in front of me for half a mile or more, there was nothing to be seen!

I walked noiselessly along the edge, keeping myself concealed as much as possible, for I now began to fear that the bison, too, had crossed over to this side, and were in the same jungle as myself, hence I had to be more careful. I had proceeded in this way for perhaps three-quarters of a mile, in a state of anxiety and suspense, when I noticed that the valley seemed to be coming to an end, as if the jungles on both sides were converging, and would presently unite.

My spirits sank to zero at the thought, for should the valley prove to be a *cul-de-sac* my chance of a successful stalk would be over for the day. However, anything was better than suspense, and anxious to know the worst at once, I hurried on, regardless of the risk.

I accordingly left the cover, and running along the edge of it for a couple of hundred yards, came suddenly to a bend where the valley, instead of ending, seemed to continue to the right. A closer examination confirmed this supposition, so dropping on my hands and knees, I crept cautiously round the corner.

It was fortunate that I had taken this precaution, for, as I rose to my feet, behind a sheltering bush, there were the bison, about two hundred yards in front of me, grazing in the open. Examining them through the glasses, I counted nine cows and a bull, the former evidently on the alert, for every now and then one would raise her head and sniff suspiciously around.

The bull also kept walking to and fro as if he, too, was not quite easy in his mind. The spot on which they stood was about the centre of the valley, which there was perhaps one hundred yards in width, hence my best way to approach them was, obviously, through the jungle I was in, especially as the wind would still be in my favour.

Having come to this decision I lost no time in carrying it out, for the animals being so restless I feared they might move off. I found the jungle much heavier than it looked, and had some difficulty in making my way through it as noiselessly as I had hoped to do.

However, by picking my steps carefully, often on tip-toe, and taking advantage of every natural opening, I managed fairly well; my progress was somewhat crab-like,

and necessarily slow, nor could I tell whether in the right direction, having to change my course so often, but still I persevered, and, when I thought I had come far enough, turned toward the open.

This was an important movement, for if I had judged correctly the herd should be now about sixty yards in front of me. Fortunately, the jungle here was lighter, and I was able to go through it without the slightest sound, but with every step I took I paused to look and listen. Advancing thus, foot by foot, I had made perhaps fifteen yards in about as many minutes, when I found the high jungle come abruptly to an end, leaving nothing but grass before me, a fringe of it some twenty yards in width, and so low that I could see over it.

As I stood for a time undecided what to do, some dark object at the further edge attracted my attention. They looked at first like ant-hills, those curious creations of the white ant, but presently to my amazement they seemed to me to move! Thinking this must be an optical illusion, due to the waving of the grass, I examined them through the glasses, when, to my inexpressible delight, I discovered that what I had mistaken for tops of ant-hills, were the withers of the bison!

I had hit them off exactly, and there they were, barely fifty yards in front of me, and seemingly quite unconscious of my presence, for they were evidently grazing; but as I stood watching them, I saw a head or two raised suspiciously in the air, then slowly sink down again, as if still thinking that something was amiss.

I stooped down at once, then, again on hands and knees, crept silently through the grass till I had almost reached the edge and could now see the herd distinctly. They had moved further into the open, and were now about thirty yards from me, all grazing except the bull, who was lying down in front of them, nearer to me than the others.

Keeping my eyes fixed on him, I now laid myself flat upon the ground, and was just about to bring my rifle to the shoulder when some cartridges in my pocket unfortunately rattled. He was up in an instant, and glaring savagely around, stood sniffing the air; evidently trying to locate the sound.

Now was my opportunity, for he was standing broadside on to me. Trembling with excitement I held my breath, and raising the rifle carefully, pulled for his head, just behind the ear. As the smoke cleared off I saw that he had dropped upon his knees, then he rolled over and lay kicking on his side.

I sprang up immediately, shouting loudly at the herd, for at the sound of the report they had come charging down upon me; but yelling with all the energy of despair, I fortunately succeeded in changing their direction and, turning sharply to the left, they went scampering up the valley. So close had they approached that I could have touched them with my rifle; in fact, another yard, and I must have been trampled under foot, killed outright perhaps, or at least probably maimed for life. It was truly a marvellous escape, and all due to a powerful pair of lungs!

But I had no sooner escaped one danger than I was threatened by another, for I had hardly recovered from my fright and was stooping to pick up a cartridge I had dropped, when I heard a sound behind me, and, turning quickly round, saw to my horror that the bull was on his feet!

Standing there with glaring eyeballs, and the blood pouring from both nostrils, he was not a pleasing sight at such unpleasantly close quarters! Not that I had much time to study his appearance, for the next moment, having either scented or caught sight of me, down went his head, and with a bellow that shook the very ground, he came thundering down upon me.

I had barely time to bring my rifle to the shoulder, and when I fired he had almost reached me. I had aimed roughly at his head, only too thankful to get in a shot at all, but, fortune favouring me, the bullet, as I subsequently discovered, struck exactly where it should, and he rolled over at my feet.

Reloading my empty rifle, I stood prepared for a second resurrection, for I did not know then that my bullet had pierced the brain; but presently, as his struggles ceased, I saw blood oozing from his forehead through a hole which had not been there before, and I knew then that I had won. However, my late experience had taught me caution, so,

controlling my longing to examine him, I waited for a time.

He looked monstrous as he lay, and even in death an awe-inspiring sight, but this only enhanced my joy at having conquered him, and proud of my achievement, I shouted for the horsekeeper. I would have summoned a whole village had there been any near, so elated did I feel at my success and so anxious to proclaim it to the world.

The man soon appeared in answer to my call, running quickly and dragging the pony after him to its evident annoyance. He had my camera slung round him, and with it I took a photo of my prize, exactly as he had fallen, and with the blood still pouring from his wounds.

The first bullet had struck below the ear, and must have proved fatal in the end; but the second was through the centre of the forehead, penetrating the brain—a lucky shot to which I probably owed my life; for, fired more or less at random, it might easily have struck a far less vital spot, and thus given the furious animal time to wreak its vengeance.

However, "all's well that ends well," is a very true old maxim, and one I quite agreed with as I contemplated the fine head I had secured, and the only thought that troubled me now was how to take it off. My hunting knife was useless for the purpose, and the horsekeeper had nothing more suitable about him. But presently he remembered that there were some coolies working near, and suggested that one of them might possibly have an axe. This being the very thing I wanted, I sent him off at once, and in the meantime I commenced operating with the knife. An hour later he returned with the weapon and half a dozen men.

But even with an axe we found the task most difficult; however, we accomplished it at last, and then cut off the feet, for I was anxious to possess as many trophies as I could. The carcass I made over to the coolies, who had now come up in scores, and fell upon it like vultures on their prey.

Despatching the horsekeeper and the coolies to the bungalow with my spoil, I stood for a time watching the curious spectacle of human beings fighting like wild beasts

for their food, and with an eagerness which might lead one to believe that they had been starving for a month! What a theme it would have furnished to a "globe-trotting sensationalist," in search of material for "his book," and how eagerly he would have seized upon the incident as an example of "the poor, starving native," thus forced to eke out his miserable existence!

But as a matter of fact the scene had no such tragical significance, being merely an illustration of the extraordinary fascination that "free gifts" possess for all the lower classes, white and black alike, emphasized perhaps, in the particular instance, by the inordinate desire that coolies have for fresh meat in any shape or form.

However, it was not a pleasant sight, and I soon had enough of it; so leaving the men still squabbling for their portion, I rode back to the bungalow—if not a sadder, most certainly a wiser man, so far as bison were concerned, for until that day, I had known but little of the habits and appearance of these animals, and nothing at all of their disposition, hence had not realized there was any danger in stalking them on foot.

CHAPTER XXI

My next adventure in these hills was one I experienced when out hunting for ibex. Having come to the conclusion, too hurriedly as will be seen, that there were no tigers in the district, I had turned my attention to these smaller animals *faute de mieux*.

I had taken up this sport somewhat listlessly at first, but having stalked herd after herd for days without being able to approach near enough to fire, I had been finally tantalized into taking an interest in the game, and was now as keen as I had previously been indifferent.

It was while in this frame of mind, that one evening, as we were returning from one of many fruitless expeditions after these tantalizing animals, I was suddenly addressed by my "shikari" in these words: "Master wanting shoot jungle goat?" as if he had only just discovered why I had been taking all this trouble.

For ten long, weary days had I been toiling up and down the hills around my bungalow, striving vainly to obtain a shot at an ibex, and now to be asked "Whether I wished to shoot one?" was, to say the least of it, somewhat trying to the temper! However, curbing the very natural inclination "to punch my questioner's head," I asked him what he meant by this superfluous, and seemingly impertinent inquiry; whereupon he informed me that as I was both his father and his mother, it was quite impossible he could be guilty of so heinous an offence.

He then proceeded to explain that, in order to hunt these wily animals, with any prospect of success, it was necessary to be on the ground the night before—a fact he had been all the time aware of, but, with the perversity of his kind, had hitherto concealed.

I merely quote this as an instance of the difficulties a young sportsman has to contend with on first arrival

in the country, where game, though still abundant, is often difficult to obtain owing to the stupidity of the people.

But to proceed with my story. Acting on this information I resolved to camp out for a week end, as soon as I could manage it. Accordingly, one Thursday afternoon, a week or two later, I set out, arriving at my camp a little after sunset, and halted for the night.

The next day I started at 2 a.m., and after a long, laborious climb, reached the "feeding grounds" of the ibex about 4.30. Here I waited patiently, concealed behind a rock, till 6, when, just as the dawn was breaking, I saw two herd of ibex on the opposite hill. One was a very large one, but the other, though much smaller, interested me the most, for it was nearer, and I thought I could distinguish a buck or two amongst them.

I questioned the "shikari," and as he and a coolie we had with us were both of the same opinion, I decided to stalk the smaller herd.

We had to exercise the greatest caution, for there is no animal in India more wary than the ibex, its sense of sight and smell being keen beyond belief. The wind was not quite favourable where we were, so leaving our shelter behind the rock, we crept cautiously down our hill, and making a long detour, climbed the one on which the herd were feeding. Being now on the same ridge as the ibex, and with the wind blowing directly from them, we could make our stalk with less risk of our presence being detected.

The herd, when we first sighted it, was about five hundred yards away from us, but in making our detour we had considerably increased this distance, and were now about one thousand yards behind it. Following the ridge for some distance, ascending all the time, we had nearly reached its highest point when the "shikari," who was leading, halted suddenly, making a sign for me to go on.

"Master see goat on top," he whispered as I passed him, a statement which made me somewhat nervous, thinking he meant they were on the summit.

However, picking my footsteps carefully, I commenced clambering up the hill, which for the last twenty yards or so was exceedingly precipitous; at length, breathless from

my exertion and trembling with excitement, I finally reached the crest. I rested here a moment, and my eyes being now on a level with the top, looked cautiously around, expecting to see the herd quite close; but much to my surprise there was not an ibex on the hill!

To say I was disappointed would scarcely be correct, in fact, to tell the truth, I felt considerably relieved, for I was in no condition for accurate shooting at the moment, and doubt much if I could have hit a haystack at ten yards! However, I examined the hill carefully with my glasses, till satisfied that the animals were not there, and was about to climb down again, when I noticed another smaller ridge to my right. Following this with my eyes I found it ascended to a level somewhat higher than where I stood, so, concluding the ibex were probably on top, I decided to follow them.

It was a long, but fairly gradual ascent, and took me half an hour to accomplish, but I was rewarded for my trouble, for as I gained the crest I saw the herd before me. Yes, there they were at last; about twenty of them in all, with five good bucks amongst them, and scarcely two hundred yards from where I stood!

It was the first time I had seen these animals so close, and as they seemed quite unconscious of my presence I watched them for some minutes. The wind being in my favour and my "khaki" covered "topee" alone visible above the crest, it would have been difficult for even an ibex to detect me.

However, as my last ten days' experience had taught me to respect the marvellous instinct of these beasts, I was not inclined to prolong the situation. Selecting the biggest "saddle-back" amongst them, I raised my ·500 cautiously to the shoulder, and aiming carefully, slowly pulled the trigger, but in spite of all my care I saw that I had missed.

The buck was still standing where he was, evidently untouched, but looking about inquiringly as if wondering whence the noise proceeded, whilst the rest of the herd seemed equally perplexed. Without waiting to reload I fired the second barrel, and this time with more success, for as the sound of the report went echoing through the hills, I

saw the buck jump forward, and the next moment, followed by the others, he was off along the ridge.

In the meantime I had climbed up to the top and, slipping in fresh cartridges, followed in pursuit, but as well might I have attempted to race a locomotive, for the herd was out of sight before I had run ten yards. However, I continued to run on, and reaching the end of the spur, caught sight of them again, galloping along another ridge, but quite five hundred yards away.

Examining them through the glasses, I saw to my disgust the buck that I had fired at running on three legs, seemingly in no way inconvenienced, and keeping well up with the rest. I fired again, but they were now practically out of range, and my bullet struck the ground several yards behind them as they disappeared over a crest.

This was the last I saw of them that day, for presently a heavy mist came rolling up the valley, and within an incredibly short time, every hill around me was blotted out of sight. This sudden transformation of daylight into darkness merely astonished me at first, but soon, as the mist grew denser, I became seriously alarmed, as I could no longer see the ridge on which I stood. I had noticed as I came along that this ridge was a very narrow one, and as there was a precipice on each side of it, I felt that to grope my way back in the dark would be too perilous an undertaking.

I accordingly decided on remaining where I was till the mist had cleared away, or till such time as the "shikari," wondering at my absence, should come to my assistance. But he betrayed no such anxiety for my safety, for when three hours later the mist had cleared sufficiently to permit of my returning, I found him and the coolie both comfortably asleep!

It is unnecessary to mention the measures I adopted to arouse them, but they were simple and evidently effective, as they started up in terror, thinking some wild beast had attacked them!

It was useless to attempt another stalk that morning, as it was already close on noon, and most of the hills around were still enveloped in the mist, which seemed likely to continue. We accordingly started back for camp, where we eventually arrived, though not till nearly dusk, as we had

some difficulty in finding it; the so-called "camp" being merely a big tree beneath whose sheltering branches I had passed the previous night, and where I had left my servant and a coolie to guard my few belongings.

But even in India, that land of luxury and ease, a sportsman must be prepared to rough it now and then, especially when in pursuit of game so wary as the ibex! And after all, to sleep beneath a starlit sky is no very great hardship to a man who has been tramping about all day, nor is a bundle of dry leaves a bad substitute for a bed under similar conditions. Hence, no sooner had I dined, which I did most ravenously off cold fowl and potatoes, than I sought my rustic couch, and, wrapping a blanket round me, was soon enjoying the sleep I had fairly earned.

The next morning, despite my previous day's exertion, I was up again at two, and after a hurried "chota hazri," eaten in the dark, started for our ground, accompanied by the "shikari" and a coolie as before.

We took up the position we had held the previous day, and again, as the dawn appeared, we saw a herd of ibex on the same hill across the valley to our right. It was evidently the herd I had pursued the day before, but my glasses soon revealed to me a vacancy amongst the bucks. Four now were all that I could see, while yesterday there had been five. Where then was the fifth—the big saddle-back I had wounded, and which had limped off with the others?

This was the question that now puzzled me, for the wound was not a serious one, and unlikely to have proved fatal; hence, he was probably alive, and, if so, should be with the herd.

I appealed to the "shikari," thinking that his knowledge of wild beasts and their ways might enable him to suggest some plan to trace the wounded buck.

"Hims lie down somewhere, I think. Never mind, soon find him," replied the man, and with such convincing confidence that I at once decided to postpone the stalk until we had searched the valley, which we did most diligently for some time, but without any success.

Finally, after searching every likely spot, we abandoned the attempt, and mounting the ridge on which we had seen

the herd, were walking cautiously along it, when the "shikari" suddenly touched me on the shoulder, and pointing to a rock some ten yards to our front, whispered, "Kadei (buck), sir, look."

Sure enough there was the saddle-back, lying, apparently asleep; or at any rate seemingly quite unconscious of our proximity.

I raised the rifle quickly, but as I brought the hammer to full cock the click of the lock aroused him; the next instant he was up on to his feet and jumping off the rock was thirty yards away before I had time to pull. I fired a snap-shot at him as he went bounding along the ridge and evidently hit, as he stumbled to the shot, but picking himself up quickly was going as strong as ever, when I fired the second barrel. This bullet hit him too, and apparently pretty hard, for he now took refuge in a jungle, where he stood with his back and horns only visible above the grass.

Reloading quickly I took a careful sight and fired, aiming for the shoulder. Almost simultaneously with the report the beast gave one tremendous bound, high up in the air, and falling backwards lay struggling in the grass. I ran up at once, but he was dead before I reached him, the bullet having penetrated the heart; I found now that my first shot had merely grazed the buttocks, but the second, striking at the junction of the tail, had gone right through the body.

He was evidently the beast I had hit the day before, for one hind leg, too, was broken, and from the appearance of the wound I could see it was not so recent as the others. He looked, as he lay there, quite a good-sized beast, with a massive pair of horns, measuring, as I subsequently ascertained, 13¼ ins.

But now, having "bagged" my ibex, I began to wonder how we were to get him home. For we were some distance from the camp, and there was no assistance to be obtained nearer than my bungalow!

Fortunately both my attendants were as interested in this question as myself, and neither of them inclined to forgo a feast of goat-flesh that night, soon devised a plan for reducing the said flesh to portable dimensions.

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Borrowing my hunting-knife for the purpose, the "shikari" first cut off the head, then, with the assistance of the coolie and an old penknife, proceeded to remove the skin from the carcass.

This operation necessarily occupied some time, and being finally completed, they cut up the body as skilfully as a butcher would a sheep, into ordinary joints, which they wrapped up in the skin, and the coolie then placing the bundle on his head, started off for camp.

We were now free to continue the day's "sport," and I soon sighted the herd we had originally proposed stalking; they were still on the same ridge, but had moved on to a knoll about half a mile away, and the wind being favourable, we decided on stalking them at once. The ground, too, was fortunately in our favour, as between us and the knoll there was a depression in the ridge which would enable us to get within range without being observed.

Descending cautiously till we were out of sight of them, we did the rest of the distance at a run, and climbing the opposite side, found ourselves within easy distance of a buck which was standing nearer than the rest. We had so suddenly come upon him that I had no time to think, but raising the rifle quickly just covered him and fired. He sank down on to his knees, and rolling over was too evidently dead to need the second barrel.

Though smaller than the first, he was quite a respectable sized beast, with a head seemingly little inferior to the other; and much pleased at having secured two such trophies in one day, I presented the "shikari" with "bukshish" on the spot. But I made it a condition that he should carry the heads to camp, as I was impatient to compare them; the rest of the carcass we hung up in a tree, proposing to send for it next morning.

We had a long trudge back to camp, where we found the coolie had arrived with the "meat," a portion of which my servant had apparently annexed and was very evidently boiling for my dinner! In another corner of the camp, similar operations were proceeding, suggestive of an orgie to be held later in the night, when "master" had gone to sleep.

But I must go on with my tale, the strangest part of

which yet remains to tell. I was up early next morning, just as the men were starting to bring in the other ibex, and on the impulse of the moment decided to accompany them on the chance of another shot at the herd.

The road was now familiar, and with daylight to assist us, we were not long accomplishing the journey, and no ibex being in sight we climbed boldly up the knoll. But here a surprise awaited us, for as we approached the kill we could see nothing but the rope. The carcass we had left hanging there had disappeared entirely, evidently pulled out of the loop and bodily removed!

"Some black mans take him," said the "shikari," looking suspiciously at the coolies, but as they had been in camp all night they were obviously not the culprits.

There were some drops of blood upon the ground, but this was easily to be accounted for since we had cut the animal's head off before hanging up the body. But searching further we discovered similar marks of blood, leading from the tree, and, following these some distance, found they apparently led into a jungle on the far side of the knoll.

It was now evident that the carcass had been taken into the jungle, but whether by man or beast, it was impossible to tell, the ground being too hard for any footprints to be visible. However, we were not long left in doubt, for as we neared the jungle we came across a patch of sand, when the "shikari," who was leading, signed to us to halt, and going down on his hands and knees examined it most carefully.

A minute or so later he started to his feet, and pointing to something on the ground, beckoned to me to come nearer. "Peria pilli, master, look," he whispered as I joined him.

I had never heard the words before, and wondering what they meant, looked down to where he pointed, and there, deeply imprinted in the sand, were several circular depressions, varying in size from 1½ to 4 inches in diameter, the larger ones in the centre and the others on either side, a little way behind.

That they were the footprints of wild animals was evident, even to my unpractised eye; but what kind of

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beasts had left them was more than I could guess. Then suddenly I remembered that "Pilli" was the concluding syllable of the local name for panther, and instinctively I guessed that "Peria pilli" must therefore mean a tiger, and in the excitement of the moment gave utterance to my thoughts.

"Yes. Tiger, master; one big and two little ones," whispered the "shikari," pointing to the difference in the sizes of the pugs and their relative position, which showed clearly that the larger animal had been followed by two smaller ones, evidently of the same species.

I was now quite sure that the footprints were undoubtedly those of a tigress and two cubs, and such being the case, the question naturally arose as to what had best be done.

Young and inexperienced as I was then, and burning with the desire to add another so rare a trophy as a tiger to my "bag," I was all for following the beasts into the jungle; but I obtained little encouragement from the others. They knew too well the folly of such a proceeding and the dangers attendant on it, and deaf to persuasion or threats flatly refused to undertake the risk. However, after a lengthy confabulation and promise of "bukshish" in proportion to the danger to be run, a compromise was finally effected—viz. that the shikari and myself should walk cautiously along the edge of the cover, on the chance of finding the tigress basking outside it in the sun, and thus obtain a shot.

To understand what followed it is necessary to explain that the jungle was a narrow strip of dense undergrowth and trees about two hundred yards in length. One side of it was bounded by a continuation of the knoll, already mentioned, and on the other was a slope, descending gradually to the valley, some hundreds of feet below us. The knoll side being too steep for the tigress to climb we chose the other, and taking advantage of any cover we could find, advanced cautiously, the "shikari" carrying my spare rifle, a Winchester Express, while I had my ·500, both ready for instant use.

We had proceeded in this manner about 150 yards when our progress was arrested by a low whistle from

above, and looking up saw the coolies, whom we had told to come along the ridge, pointing excitedly to a spot a little to our front.

We guessed at once that it was the tigress they had viewed, and signing to them to keep quiet, continued to advance, but with greater caution.

There was not much jungle left now, and a minute or two more would find us at the end of it—possibly face to face with the tigress, and now that I realized this possibility my anxiety to meet her diminished with every step we took.

I stole a glance at the "shikari," but his countenance betrayed no signs of agitation, though I could see that eyes and ears alike were both on the alert. Encouraged by his demeanour and the feeling that I could rely upon his aid, I pulled myself together and, holding my breath, covered the next few yards which still lay between us and the corner of the jungle.

The next moment we had reached the bend and then, while still concealed behind a bush, beheld a sight which many an older sportsman than myself has probably never seen. For there, scarce twenty paces from me, and well out in the open, was the tigress! Half-reclined upon her side, she seemed to be watching her cubs at play, as they rolled over one another in their rough-and-tumble game. She was lying with her head turned away from us, and the wind, fortunately, blowing in our direction, there was little risk of our presence being discovered.

I was so fascinated at the sight that I stood gazing at her quite lost in admiration, till the "shikari," touching me on the arm, recalled me to myself. At this moment a slight noise made by one of the coolies attracted the attention of the tigress, and starting suddenly to her feet, she stood looking back into the jungle. The cubs, too, with an instinct almost incredible in animals of that age, seemed to know there was danger near at hand, and running to their mother, crouched down at her feet; the three making as interesting a picture as the eye could wish to dwell on.

But our position was too critical to permit of our enjoying this rare spectacle, for now that her suspicions

were aroused, the tigress might discover us any moment, and her maternal instincts prompt her to attack us. She was standing broadside on to us, so pushing the muzzle of my rifle noiselessly through the leaves, I aimed carefully at a spot an inch behind her shoulder. As I was about to press the trigger, she turned her head towards me—and our eyes meeting as I fired, I knew that she had seen me.

From that moment I have no distinct recollections as to the sequence of events, but so rapidly did they succeed each other that the impression left upon my mind was that they had all occurred at once. In fact, in the confusion that ensued, it was impossible to tell what had actually taken place, but almost simultaneously with the report, the tigress must have launched herself upon us, for the sky was darkened for a moment as some huge object passed over our heads with a roar that shook the very ground we stood on.

I turned quickly round expecting her to renew the attack at once, and such was probably her intention, for I saw her crouching for her spring; but before she could accomplish it, I heard a shot behind me, and she rolled over on to her side. A struggling mass of fur was now all that I could see, and remembering that my second barrel was still loaded, discharged its contents into it, trusting to good fortune to hit a vital spot. It was the luckiest fluke I ever made, and probably saved our lives, for, as we subsequently discovered, the bullet struck her on the head, and penetrating the brain, caused almost instant death. Her struggles ceased immediately, and with one long, convulsive shudder she lay stretched out at full length and absolutely still.

We watched her for some time not daring to approach—then threw some clods at her—and, not till we were satisfied that life was quite extinct, did we venture to go near. She proved to be a very fine young tigress, about 8 feet 10 inches in length, and proportionately massive, with a well-marked, glossy skin generally to be met with amongst tigers of that kind.

The first shot we found had struck her on the shoulder, but much too far behind, which accounted for her

subsequent vitality, while the Winchester bullet fired by the "shikari" had merely broken one fore leg.

Neither of these wounds would have prevented her renewing the attack, and had not my last bullet so providentially ended her existence, she would probably have been on to us while our rifles were still empty! What might have happened then is not difficult to imagine, but it is doubtful whether either the "shikari" or myself would have lived to tell the tale, as a tigress with cubs is always a formidable foe, but if wounded in addition is more than a match for two men practically unarmed!

But such are the risks a sportsman must accept if he aspires to be a successful hunter of big game, and with this comforting reflection we turned our attention to the skinning of our prize. This difficult operation being completed with perhaps more despatch than skill, we cut off the head, and were preparing to return when I remembered that the cubs were still at large. They were a prize well worth the trouble of a search, but though we scoured the jungle, from one end to the other, no trace of them could be found. They had evidently sought refuge in some small cave or hollow, of which there were many in the jungle, concealed by the undergrowth; we were accordingly compelled to abandon the attempt and started back for camp, where we arrived shortly before sundown.

AN ARDENT SPORTSMAN.

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CHAPTER XXII

On my return, I related my adventure to my chum, who was much interested in the story, for it seemed that another sporting friend of his—who was staying with him at the time—had also, while out after ibex, met with a somewhat similar experience.

My friend, though not a sportsman, was an excellent raconteur, and related the incident most humorously. Indeed the story amused and interested me so much that when we had parted for the night, I wrote it down while still fresh in my mind, as one to be remembered and added to my store of sporting anecdotes.

Like most tales well told, *viva voce*, it loses half its qualities in reproduction, still in this particular instance, the incident alone is, I hope, sufficient in itself to interest most sportsmen.

It appeared then that Jones—for such was the unassuming patronymic inherited by his guest, to which those responsible for his being had added the more euphonious prefix of Cornelius, to distinguish him from other members of that tribe—Cornelius Jones, then—to give him his full title—was also a planter, carrying on his occupation in a wild and remote corner of these hills, which from the nature of the country was not favourable to sport. He was nevertheless an ardent sportsman, and whenever an opportunity offered, took advantage of it to indulge in his favourite pursuit. Indeed, apart from his professional aspirations, he had but two objects in life: the first, to slay and possess the skin of that rarest of known beasts, a black panther, and the second, to secure a record ibex head.

It was with these objects in view that he had accepted his friend's invitation to spend a month with him, for he knew that both these animals were to be found in that

locality, and hoped within the period of his leave to satisfy his ambitions.

For days before experiencing his adventure, he had made many a long tramp amongst the hills in quest of one or other of these much-coveted treasures—hitherto without any success. At length, late one dark October night, his "shikari" came to him and reported that he had that evening seen a herd of several buck ascending a neighbouring hill.

Hope once again rose strong in Jones' breast—as it had many a time before—but, forgetting for the moment all previous disappointments, he was keen to try again. To ensure his rising early, he adopted the best method of not going to bed at all, and at three o'clock in the pitchy darkness sallied forth with the "shikari." Feeling their way as best they could, for it was impossible to see it even with the lantern, which only served to show how very dark it was, they trudged along the jungle track, stumbling every moment over the loose stones with which the path was strewed.

The distance from the bungalow to the summit of the hill they were bound for was barely five miles, but most of it stiff climbing, and although they had tramped steadily all the time, it was seven o'clock before they reached their destination. But the climb proved worth the toil it had entailed, for as they gained the summit, the first object their eyes lit on, was an ibex standing on the slope about a hundred yards below them. Unfortunately it had winded them as soon as they had seen it, and before the excited sportsman could bring his rifle to the shoulder, it went scampering down the slope with the speed of a locomotive. Jones fired off both barrels, with scarce an interval between them, but as well might he have tried to hit a cannon-ball in its flight as that fleeting vision, which vanished from his sight as rapidly as the smoke from the muzzle of his rifle.

He knew that he had missed, for he had seen, with disgust, the bullets strike the ground several feet behind; but nothing daunted he continued along the ridge, trusting to good luck to see the beast again from another point of view. In this he was disappointed, but fortune had better things in store for him this time.

Rounding a point a little further on, the "shikari" thought he saw something moving on a hill about half a mile away, and Jones, putting up his glasses, made out a herd of does—about one hundred in number—and amongst them, to his delight, eight saddle-backs, or bucks. Unfortunately a valley lay between, and the wind, too, being unfavourable, necessitated making a long detour, which occupied much time and entailed another long, stiff climb to gain the summit of the hill nearest to that held by the herd.

At length, approaching against the wind, they had come sufficiently near to risk a shot, when the "shikari," touching his master's arm, pointed to a long black object on some rising ground a hundred yards beyond the herd. That it was an animal of some kind seemed evident, for it was moving. "What can it be?" thought Jones, as putting up his glasses he focussed them on the object. The next moment he had nearly dropped the costly instrument, his hand trembling with excitement at what it had revealed—for there, crouched flat almost with the ground, and its tail waving gently from side to side, was a magnificent black panther—apparently, like himself, stalking the unsuspecting herd.

Slowly and stealthily, taking advantage of every bush and boulder in its path, it was gradually, but surely, lessening its distance from the goats—for the beast, with the proverbial cunning of its kind, was approaching them at right angles to the direction of the wind.

It would have been an interesting sight to any one, this glimpse of wild-beast life behind the scenes, but for Jones it had a special, though tantalizing, fascination, for here was the very animal he had coveted so long, displayed in all its beauty, and yet he seemed no nearer to securing the tempting trophy.

Enraptured with the sight, he kept the glasses fixed upon the beast, cudgelling his brains the while to evolve some scheme by which he might approach it nearer and unseen, when suddenly the animal ceased its stealthy movement, and peering inquiringly behind, appeared to be watching something in the valley down below.

"He is waiting for the mist to cover his advance,"

whispered the "shikari," with the confidence born of his knowledge of the cat tribe and their ways; and he was right, for presently they perceived a dense grey fog rising from the valley and coming up rapidly with the wind.

Here was a fresh difficulty to contend with, for the panther, though possibly within range, was still too far to make certain of a hit. Jones, fairly puzzled for the time, resolved at length to wait and chance its coming nearer before the mist came up. But he had underestimated the extraordinary cunning and keen senses of these animals, for as he stood waiting, the beast becoming suddenly suspicious turned quickly round and galloped off into the jungle.

"We shall not see him any more to-day, sahib," whispered the "shikari" again; and Jones, knowing he was right, now turned his attention once more to the bucks, and to make quite sure of them as some consolation for the panther he had lost, tried to improve his position; but in his attempt to do so ran into some outlying does he had not noticed. These gave the alarm at once, and the next moment the whole herd ran off at lightning speed.

Fortunately the buck ran all together in a bunch, and Jones, hurriedly bringing up his rifle, fired into the group, getting off four barrels before they were out of range. And then a strange thing happened, an incident probably hitherto unparalleled in the history of sport—to wit the strange proceeding of a hunter being assisted in his hunt by one of the animals he was hunting!

The incident referred to happened in this way. As the ibex in the first rush of their alarm made off, they took the direction of the jungle in which the panther had just entered; but winding this beast almost immediately—or perhaps catching sight of it—pulled up with one accord. Then, finding themselves as it were between two fires, completely lost their heads, and running to and fro from one point of danger to the other, were evidently too bewildered to decide which of the two impending perils it was most expedient to avoid.

Meanwhile Jones, taking full advantage of the assistance so opportunely given, and caring little at the moment how or whence it came, loaded and fired as rapidly as he could

SKINNING AN IBEX.

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into the panic-stricken group, letting off sixteen cartridges before the mist, descending like a pall, hid them from his sight. But half an hour later, when the mist had cleared, and he saw two exceptionally fine saddle-backs lying dead before him, the part played by the panther, the beast he had just been watching with murderous intent, came back to his mind, and he could not but marvel at the strange irony of fate which had transformed his late intended victim into an ally!

Searching further, he discovered another dead saddle-back, entangled in some branches overhanging the ravine, and sending the "shikari" down to cut away some of the creepers, he took off his "kummerband," intending to use it as a rope to haul the carcass up. Suddenly there was a crash, and running to the brink he was just in time to see the ibex and "shikari" disappearing into space. With a stupidity almost inconceivable, the man had cut through the branch he stood on, the other end of which supported the carcass. Fortunately the brushwood broke his fall, and he finally reached the bottom apparently unhurt, though somewhat out of temper, to judge from his language as he sat there, examining his scanty clothing torn almost to shreds. However, after a time, remembering that eight annas (sixpence) out of the coming "bukshish," judiciously expended would purchase a new "suit," he cheered up, and, shouldering the ibex, ascended by an easier path to the plateau, whence he had made his involuntary descent.

In the meantime, Jones, always on the look-out for something phenomenal in heads, had already examined and measured the other two, but on arrival at the third, a finer beast than either, visions of a record rose before his eyes. However, from his subsequent silence on the subject, we may conclude he is still striving for that honour, for nothing short of a sudden extinction of the species could induce him to abandon the competition.

On the whole, however, he was—for the moment—much pleased with his day's work, more especially on finding that of the twenty shots he had fired, thirteen were accounted for. He was grateful, too, to the panther for the assistance it had given, at the same time he never quite forgave the animal for the cunning it had shown in saving its own skin.

CHAPTER XXIII

My six months' leave, like the schoolboys' holidays, passed only too rapidly; and on my return to my own province I found myself transferred, to my regret, to the district of D——, which, however, proved happily to be also a sporting one. This, coupled with the fact that the camping season had already set in, left me little to complain of.

For the first six weeks, however, my duties kept me tied to my office table—as is usually the case on joining a new district—the ways of one's predecessor being, rightly or wrongly, seldom one's own. Finally, having made myself acquainted with the working of the district, so far as can be ascertained from figures, and having overcome the aspirations common to most "new brooms," I was free to visit the interior of my district, where alone it is possible to test, with anything like accuracy, whether facts agree with figures. Accordingly, one morning towards the middle of December found me engaged in the pleasing task of superintending the despatch of my first camp; a somewhat important undertaking since, to quote the words of the old song—"so very much depends upon the style in which it's done," for in India—that generally supposed land of luxury and ease, it is even more necessary than in England to see that orders given are duly carried out—more especially is this necessary when setting out on a lengthened tour, since all one's comfort and convenience depend on how efficiently the preliminary arrangements have been made, arrangements which, as will be shown later, require much thought and careful planning. For it must be remembered that to most Indian officials, camping is a part of their lives—and generally looked forward to as an oasis, so to speak, in the desert of their existence, when no longer compelled to pass their days in

monotonous inactivity they can, indeed must, necessarily devote them to out-of-door pursuits.

To the ordinary "stay-at-home Englishman," "camping out" is usually suggestive of more or less discomfort and privations; in other words, a "roughing it" condition, only to be indulged in, occasionally, as a tonic by those seeking some new sensation for a mind weary for the time of the ease and luxuries of life. But to the Anglo-Indian official, camp life, being a part of his official duties, he regards it from quite a different point of view, viz. as a period of hard work, combined with such amusement as the situation may occasionally afford. At the same time he cannot fail to realize that there is no other calling or profession in which the duties, for practically half a year, necessitate such a healthy and attractive mode of life or one more congenial with the habits of the ordinary Englishman.

Tents are provided by the Government for this purpose, together with a liberal allowance for their carriage and other incidental expenses which such journeys may entail.

The tents are large, luxurious structures, averaging from twelve to sixteen feet square. Canvas houses, in fact, to all intents and purposes; and furnished with the necessary furniture, all made to roll up or take to pieces for convenience of carriage; the number of tents supplied to each officer is generally sufficient to allow of one or more being sent on in advance; thus, when moving camp from one place to another, the discomforts of the move are considerably minimised.

At the same time it must not be assumed that "camping out" on the scale it is done in India, can be carried out without some little trouble and inconvenience to the individual. On the contrary, the preparations for each tour require both time and thought. The route to be traversed, the different places to be visited, the work to be done at each of them, and the length of the several marches have all to be carefully considered, and an itinerary left in the office to allow of papers being sent out daily to the camp.

Having settled these official details, the next important

business is the sending out of "the camp"—always a troublesome undertaking, as the number of carts required is usually greater than can be readily procured, owing to some inscrutable objection their owners have to hiring them for this purpose; their capacity, too, being small, many are necessary.

At length, the requisite number having been obtained, not infrequently by means of a little "gentle persuasion" on the part of the police, the process of loading them commences, but is not completed without considerable altercation, combined with much abusive language, from the exasperated peons responsible for this work.

Finally, the loads being well secured with ropes, the drivers proceed to test the balance of their carts, and unless satisfied that the weight is evenly distributed the whole process is repeated, and as every cart is subjected to this test it usually takes some hours before they are ready to proceed. Meanwhile the unhappy peons and tent-pitchers, conscious that every hour thus wasted means delay in preparation of the camp, followed by unpleasant consequences to themselves, rave and storm in vain, and only add to the delay.

At last, when all the carts are ready for departure, some irresponsible under-strapper—probably the cook's "mate," who has hitherto been complacently sucking at his "hubblebubble"—will suddenly perhaps wake up to the fact that the "Hotkiss" * has been forgotten, and producing the unwieldy article, insists on its being loaded!

Now a "hot-case," generally a huge packing-case ingeniously converted to serve the purpose of a dish-warmer, is necessarily an important portion of the outfit and, being moreover used as a receptacle for the various condiments necessary for preparing the sahib's meals, cannot be left behind, and as its contents are all of a fragile nature, must be placed securely.

Hence, one or more of the carts have to be unloaded entirely, while the individual to whose neglect this trouble is all due, looks on with calm indifference, congratulating himself, doubtless, on having thus evaded the chastisement he would assuredly have received from his professional

* Hot-case.

WAITING TO BE LOADED.

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superior, had the case been left behind. After another hour or so, mostly wasted in noisy and useless altercation, the drivers scramble on to their carts and with shouts and imprecations to their bullocks, and much twisting of their tails, the cavalcade sets forth, a string of servants and camp followers straggling in its wake.

The distance to the camping ground, though probably under twenty miles, will take at least twelve hours to accomplish, for the Bengali bullock is not a speedy traveller, and two miles an hour with a heavy load behind him is the very limit of his powers, even under such strong pressure as the twisting of his tail!

On arrival at the camping-ground, usually at some time during the night, the cattle are unharnessed and given a feed of straw, whilst their drivers and the others take a few hours' rest before commencing the arduous task of unloading and pitching the many tents.

At an early hour next morning the encampment is astir, for there is plenty to be done and little time to do it before the "hakim" * is expected, when woe betide the men if the camp is not erected and his tub and breakfast ready.

Should the expected official be the Magistrate or Police Superintendent of the District, the officer of the nearest police-station will usually be present, with a posse of village "chokidars," † to the number of perhaps a hundred, collected from as many villages within his jurisdiction. These men, under the guidance of the "chuprassis," ‡ will speedily strip the carts of all that they contain, and dragging the enormous canvas bundle to the place indicated by the "khalassi," § the latter now takes charge of the operations—for to pitch such large and heavy tents requires the knowledge and experience of an expert.

One by one the huge bundles are now carefully unrolled, the poles placed in position with a peg driven in at the heel, then the canvas is drawn over, and the tents are ready for erection.

The "khalassi" now fixes the position of the pegs to which the main guys are to be attached, and while these

* Master. † Watchman. ‡ Peons.
§ Tent-pitcher.

are being driven in, fastens the guys to the top end of the poles. Some twenty or thirty men then " tail on " to each rope, and amidst tremendous shouts and yells, the huge mass of canvas, gradually assumes a perpendicular position. Pegs are now driven in opposite the lesser ropes, which are hauled taut, till the top portion of the tent is square and symmetrical. The " walls " are then laced on through the eyelet holes and the tent is complete and ready to be furnished.

The first step in this direction is to strew the floor with straw, to about the thickness of a foot—a necessary precaution, for after four months' incessant rain, the ground is somewhat damp. Heavy cotton carpets, called " setringhis," are then spread over this pile, which under their weight soon settle down evenly all over, and when the furniture is brought in and placed in position the inside of the tent has all the appearance of a comfortably furnished dining-room.

The same process is repeated till all the larger tents are erected and furnished according to the purpose for which they are respectively intended. The " shuldares " or servants' tents are next put up at some distance from the others.

Meanwhile the cook, assisted by his " mate " and others whom he has impressed into the service, has created his own premises, including an elaborate kitchen range, constructed out of mud, and is already well advanced in his culinary operations.

Gangs of the village watchmen, armed with brooms improvised out of branches, are now set to work to clean up the encampment, the empty carts are sent off to the village, the table laid for breakfast, and the " camp " is now in readiness for the reception of the sahib.

The work, from start to finish has occupied, possibly, four hours ; but in this comparatively short period what was once a wild and desolate wilderness, has been transformed as if by magic into a street of canvas houses, replete with all the comforts of more permanent habitations.

CHAPTER XXIV

In the meantime I was enjoying in anticipation the comforts that awaited me at the end of my long journey. Having started shortly after daybreak, I rode the first few miles to a village on the roadside, where I had to make a local investigation, and found the witnesses all assembled, also my dogcart ready for the continuation of my journey.

But the inquiry occupied some hours, with the result that the rest of the journey had to be made under a noonday sun, which even in December is still powerful at this time. However, with a change of horses on the way, the distance was soon covered, and in an hour or two after starting, the white canvas of the tents were to be seen, nestling amongst the trees, and seemingly quite near.

Unfortunately, in India, when travelling "across country," the sight of one's destination does not necessarily mean the journey's end, as I found, for between me and my camp there was a river, minus bridge or ferry, and with stretches of sand on either bank which took long to traverse.

But, being the police sahib, and therefore a "personage," my convenience had been consulted, and I found a posse of the useful "chokidars" * awaiting my arrival on the borders of the sand. The dogcart was speedily unharnessed, and while half a dozen men seized upon the shafts, others pushed behind, and the rest, pulling round the spokes, the trap went ploughing through the sand.

On reaching the river, which, though broad, was fordable in places, two men went on in front, seeking the shallower parts, the procession following in their track. Suddenly one of them sunk bodily up to his armpits, when a halt was called and a fresh cast had to be made.

* Village watchmen.

Finally the crossing was accomplished, and the second stretch of sand being negotiated as before, the horse was again harnessed; but while this was being done the police inspector from the camp arrived upon the scene to escort "his honour" to the tents.

Clad in skin-tight uniform, and mounted on a pony several sizes too small for him, this portly but ridiculous-looking official, sitting his steed in evident discomfort, flourished one hand in salute while the other wisely gripped the pommel of his saddle, for the pony, unaccustomed to these antics, suddenly plunged forward, and, but for this additional connection with his mount, their partnership would have probably been dissolved.

However, recovering his equilibrium he struggled back into the saddle, but the next instant was off at full gallop in the direction of the camp—not from any desire to proceed with such celerity, but because he was, for the moment, under the dominion of his steed, who, for reasons of his own, was anxious to get home.

Meanwhile, having climbed into the dogcart, I—whom discipline compelled to maintain a dignified bearing, somewhat difficult under the circumstances—followed in the wake of the vanishing policeman, now a mere speck in the distance, and finally overtook him in a ditch at the turning to the camp.

In no way disconcerted by his fall, he explained in his very best "Babu" English, "that owing to excessive velocity of horse, no doubt, he could no longer maintain equilibrium, and had therefore sustained cropper"—a fact quite evident from the condition of his clothing, for he now presented a most draggle-tail appearance.

Having thus, according to his standard of equitation, satisfactorily accounted for his presence in the ditch, he accepted with some diffidence the offer of a lift, and, scrambling on to the back seat of the dogcart, accompanied me on to camp.

As we approached the tents a "chokidar," who had probably been watching for some hours, ran on to warn the camp, and soon the servants could be seen emerging from their quarters, and hastily adjusting their attire, hastened to receive the sahib. Amongst these the

"khan-samah," clad in snow-white garments, is the most conspicuous figure; but there is a troubled look upon his face, despite his smiling welcome, for the breakfast hour has long gone past, and he is conscious that the meal is over-cooked! However, his fears are soon dispelled as the sahib, tubbed and clothed in cool apparel, presently appears, and, with an appetite born of his long abstinence, demolishes each dish as it is served. Then, with mind and body both refreshed, I was ready to enjoy some hours of restful ease, lounging in a long Indian chair, under the shelter of the trees, happy in the knowledge that no official worries could assail me till the morning.

To one who for six long, weary months has been the victim of a monotonous routine—sweltering through the day in the atmosphere of a hot and crowded police office—the fascination of the situation may be readily imagined. But if the afternoon passed pleasantly, the evening was even more enjoyable, for as the sun, setting in rosy splendour, sank behind the trees and the birds commenced their noisy preparations for the night, a gang of "chokidars" appeared, dragging huge logs, which they piled into a stack, and filling the space beneath with jute stalks, dry and combustible as timber, set the pile alight.

This is the "watch-fire" for the camp, which, with little or no attention, lasts throughout the night, serving many a useful purpose in addition to its original intention. It is usually placed in the centre of the camp, thus counteracting the effects of the heavy dew which might otherwise prove malarious. In "jungle" districts, too, it serves to scare any wild animals that may come prowling round the tents, while its warm and cheery influence spreads throughout the camp, lighting up dark corners and creating a feeling of comfort and security. To the solitary white official it is an inestimable boon, for after his lonely dinner he can sit by it and smoke, while learning from those around him the politics of the place, or discussing with his "shikari" the sport to be obtained. Much valuable information is often picked up in this way, and many a crime has been discovered, and not a few "man-eaters" brought to book from information gathered at such councils round the camp fire.

By ten o'clock, feeling rather tired, I retired to bed, when those told off to watch the camp came crowding round the fire before taking up their respective positions for the night, and an hour or two later, save for an occasional howling of the jackals, the camp was as silent as the grave. The tents being pitched near a jungle, I was awakened by a weird and curious sound as of someone sawing wood,* and while wondering at such an occupation at that hour of the night, recognized the call of some hungry leopard, prowling round the camp, and later was fortunate enough to hear the roar of the distant tiger, calling to its mate.

Being a sportsman, such sounds were as music to my ears, and I lay awake enjoying them, hoping the animals would lie up near the camp ; but I could not help thinking that if I had not possessed sporting instincts, or been of a nervous disposition, what my feelings would have been, for a tiger's call at midnight has an awe-inspiring sound !

Fortunately—or otherwise, according to the temperament of the listener—such sounds are rarely of long duration, and as the dawn approaches, fade into the distance as the animal returns to his forest lair, as happened now, giving place to the marsh partridge, with his noisy cackling challenge, calculated to wake the heaviest sleeper; but as I was already awake, I took this opportunity of making a good bag before commencing the more serious business of the day.

As I had an elephant with me in camp, my success was assured, for the birds were found in the small " purundi " † jungles fringing the marshy lowlands, and difficult to negotiate on foot, and where I also came across the leopard heard during the night, and, after some trouble, bagged him too. After an hour or so of pretty shooting, with the birds rising all around me, I eventually returned to camp with half a dozen brace of partridge, a couple or two of snipe, and the leopard—carried triumphantly behind me—slung across the pad, for such is the " glorious uncertainty " of sport in India that renders it so fascinating.

A refreshing tub and breakfast, and I was then ready

* So close is this resemblance that in some parts of Bengal the leopard goes by the name of the "Arakusier (Sawyer) *Bagh.*"

† Wild cardamum.

for the arduous duties of the day, which commenced with the formal inquiry of the case tested the day before, this formality being necessary before the plaint can be disposed of.

The inquiry is worthy of description as a specimen of the difficulties an Indian Police Officer has often to contend with. In the first place, the inquiry was held in an open space between the tents. In the centre of this space was placed a table and two chairs, one occupied by me and the other, in deference to his rank, by the Inspector of Police, while the local station officer, standing opposite, called out the names of the complainant and defendant.

As they appeared in answer to his summons, each made a low obeisance, and the plaintiff now proceeded to tell his truthless tale, interrupted at intervals by the other, with sundry observations quite irrelevant to the case. Finally, the deposition having been recorded, was read out to the deponent and unblushingly admitted to be a " true and faithful statement " of his case !

The accused was then asked if he had any question to put to the accuser, and promptly began a history of himself and all his family, till, admonished to confine himself to questions touching the accusation, he made a long oration, winding up with the usual formula " that being a poor man, how could he know anything of the matter " !

The witnesses for the prosecution were then examined, and after contradicting each other on every important point, those for the defence were now produced ; but, as most of them had already been bought over by the other party, the state of tangle now arrived at may be easily imagined ! Fortunately, however, the local investigation had revealed the true facts of the case, which, false from its inception, had originated in some real, or fancied, wrong done to the complainant by the accused or some member of his family many years before, and the plaint was accordingly dismissed. Then, as there was no other local matter to be attended to on that day, the rest of it was passed in disposing of reports and other papers from the office, which had arrived during the night.

At about four or five o'clock work was over for the day, and the hour or two of daylight left I employed in

sauntering round the camp or visiting the neighbouring village, to inquire about the crops or other rural matters.

The above is fairly typical of a day's routine in camp, varied from time to time by the march to the next halting-place—necessarily an uncomfortable experience, extending from the evening before the move to the afternoon of the day following, when the new camp is completed.

The "dining," or day tent—the one usually sent ahead—was struck shortly after dinner, with the usual noisy chatter characteristic of the native when at work, and as the process, plus the loading, occupies some hours, the occupant of the sleeping tent enjoys but little sleep. Finally, about midnight, the loading was completed, and as the creaking of the departing carts died away in the distance, I turned over with a sigh, hoping to snatch some hours of sleep, but only to be awakened long before the dawn by the sounds of further preparations of a character equally destructive to repose—to wit, a banging of my tent pegs and the loosening of the ropes, suggestive of a speedy demolition of my temporary abode.

Compelled thus by necessity to quit my cosy quarters, I jumped quickly out of bed, and, making a hurried toilet, emerged into the raw air of the morning, to find my "chota hazri" laid out on a table near the fire—the only signs of comfort now visible in the camp. For the scene was now one of bustle and confusion, in strange contrast with the quiet, orderly appearance of the camp the day before; with the exception of the bedroom all the tents were down, and, together with their furniture, were being rapidly converted into packages of portable dimensions, to be loaded presently on the carts, of which a number were drawn up round the camp. Indeed, looking at the chaos now existing, it would be difficult to believe that the mass of ropes and canvas lying all about could ever have formed the spacious and apparently substantial dwellings that had, so recently, towered above the plain.

The servants and attendants seemed to have undergone a similar transformation, and were now unrecognizable in their travelling attire, even to the sedate "khansamah,"

"ALL THAT WAS LEFT OF THEM."

[*To face page* 194.

whose erstwhile flowing robes had given place to a nondescript costume, crowned by a woollen comforter and terminating in " putties " and thick boots !

Meanwhile, having finished my early breakfast, I wisely superintended the preparations as I smoked my morning pipe ; then, with instructions to the men to hurry on the loading, jumped on to my horse *en route* for the next camp.

Here as before I found everything in readiness, the carts, fortunately, not having been delayed either by a breakdown on the way, a river in full flood, or as sometimes happens when the route lies through a jungle, a herd of wild elephants, or perhaps a tiger on the path which has barred their progress for a time.

Such experiences, however, are fortunately rare, for they necessarily mean discomfort to the traveller, who on arrival at the halting-place may have to wait for hours until the carts come up. But as a rule the transfer from one camp to another is attended with a minimum of discomfort to himself.

In fact, considering the rough state of the roads, the primitive construction of the vehicles used in transport, the distance that has to be traversed, and the frequency of the moves, the official when camping in his district enjoys a marvellous immunity from trouble and discomfort, and his life during the period he is in camp may be epitomized as one of luxury and ease when compared with persons travelling under ordinary conditions.

CHAPTER XXV

Up to the present, all my tiger and leopard shooting had been done, as I have shown, off elephants or " machans "—both, under ordinary circumstances, comparatively safe methods of hunting these animals, or other dangerous beasts, such as the rhinoceros or bison—and, in the district where I was stationed, the only methods possible, the jungles being too dense and impossible to negotiate on foot.

On one occasion, however, hearing of some " sambhur " said to have been seen in a part of the district which I knew to be comparatively open, I determined to stalk them on foot—shooting such harmless animals off elephants being to my mind a poor kind of sport.

I had ample time at my disposal, for, as it so happened, all the public offices were closed on account of the " Durga-Pujah " holidays—a great Hindu festival, lasting over ten days—and as the place was only some fifty miles from the station, I could cover the distance in a day by driving, provided I could obtain the number of horses necessary for the journey, for in India a horse is seldom driven over ten miles in one day. My brother officials were all very pessimistic as to the success of my expedition, declaring that without the aid of elephants I could not possibly succeed. Finally, however, I persuaded the doctor to accompany me, and, combining our respective steeds, we easily accomplished the fifty miles, arriving at our camp, which we had sent out the day before, shortly after midday.

After a tub and breakfast, we lit our pipes and sent for the " shikari," one Karram Sing, a man with a good deal of the sporting " Gurkha " blood in his veins, and consequently keen, in order that we might plan out our nine days' campaign to the best advantage.

As the " shikari " approached my heart sank, for I could see from the expression on his face that he had nothing

pleasing to impart, and my worst fears were soon to be realized. The man came up to us, accompanied by his son, and, making his " salaams," told us that he had visited every inch of the country in the neighbourhood during the past four days, and, taking advantage of the rain that had fallen the previous night, had just returned from inspecting the recent pools and puddles, but had failed to find the trace of a single footprint, nor was there a recent " form " or lair to be seen anywhere in the grass jungle around.

This was most depressing news, but I was too old a sportsman to be more than temporarily cast down by it, many years' experience having taught me that in sport luck often comes when least expected. So, telling the " shikari " we would start very early the next morning, sent him off to make the necessary preparation, while we overhauled our guns and rifles, and, loading up a few more cartridges for the latter, amused ourselves with fishing in the stream with a net improvised out of a " chudder " or sheet belonging to one of the coolies, and very soon had landed quite a plateful of tiny fish, which, served up for dinner, proved an excellent substitute for whitebait.

The next morning we were up betimes, and by six o'clock already on our way to the more distant covers, taking our lunch with us. We trudged about the whole day with an interval of perhaps one hour for lunch and a smoke ; but though we must have covered miles of ground and gone through acres of long grass, and inspected several pools of water, not a vestige could we find of anything indicating the presence of a " sambhur " or other animal in the neighbourhood.

The next day, and for six days following, we continued our search, but with no better success, and I was almost beginning to despair, when the " shikari," who felt the disappointment as keenly as we did, suggested that we should try the forest on the other side of the river. Accordingly the next morning we started from camp early, and, after an hour of stiff climbing, reached the top of a ridge, where we posted ourselves, while the beaters, whom we had left at the bottom, beat up to us from the valley below.

Placing the doctor to my right, I took up my position to the left of the advancing line and facing it. We had

been at our post about an hour when I heard a rustling among the leaves to my left, and shortly afterwards a fine " sambhur " came out about eighty yards to my left front. I fired immediately, aiming behind his left shoulder. He fell to the shot, which I found afterwards was a little too far back, but quickly regaining his legs, dashed down the hill towards the beaters.

As there was evidently no other animal in the beat, which had come close up, we followed the wounded animal as quickly as we could; but his tracks showing only occasionally, we had some difficulty in finding him. But we did so eventually, and owing to a somewhat curious accident, for we suddenly came upon him jammed in a small " nullah " and totally unable to move or extricate himself, owing probably to weakness from loss of blood. He was still alive, so I lost no time in putting him out of pain with a bullet through the brain.

We now moved our ground to another ridge running north and south, with a valley on either side. We posted ourselves as before on the ridge, sending the beaters to beat up to us from the valley as before. This was a very long beat, and ended in a blank; but just as the beaters had finished, Karram Sing, who was standing beside me, pointed out something which he declared was a " sambhur," lying under a tree on the brow of a small ridge rising from the valley to the east of where we were posted.

I looked in the direction he was pointing, but for some time could see nothing. Presently, however, I saw something moving, and soon made out the whole body of a " sambhur," with its head turned towards us and its ears twitching backwards and forwards. Judging the distance to be about 250 yards, I put up the 250 sight of my ·500 Express, and aiming full at his chest fired, hearing distinctly, to my surprise and delight, the unmistakable thud of the bullet as it struck.

On receiving the shot he got up and began moving slowly to the top of the ridge. I then fired the second barrel, which apparently hit him too, for I could see the animal stagger, but he quickly recovering himself, disappeared over the brow, though not before I had time to give him another shot.

The "shikari" started off in pursuit, and tracked him for a long distance by the blood, which was very plentiful, proving that the animal had been badly hit. However, night was coming on, and we were a long way from camp, so, much to our disgust, we had to abandon the pursuit; but before leaving the spot, I told some people of an adjacent village, who had joined in the beating, that I would give a reward to any one who would find and bring the beast into camp.

We then started homewards, much better pleased with ourselves and things in general than we had been for some time past. But we were not destined to remain long in this comparatively blissful condition, for on our way home the "shikari" told us that from inquiries he had made from some wood-cutters whom he met on his return from tracking the wounded stag, he had ascertained that this and the one we had already bagged were the only two deer they had seen about for some days past, and as these wood-cutters practically lived in the jungles their statement was more than likely to be correct.

This information, coming as it did from so reliable a source, naturally depressed us considerably, more especially as we had now been shooting—or, to speak more correctly, been out in search of something to shoot—for eight consecutive days, and, so far, our bag consisted of one "sambhur" only! A poor return for all our hard work.

Our leave, too, was nearly up, and we were due back to our duties the next day but one; there was thus but one day left to us in which to retrieve the crushing bad luck that had hitherto attended us. There was no fresh "khubbur," and altogether things looked exceeding black, and our dinner that night, in spite of our recent success, was a very dismal feast. However, with the after-dinner pipe, assisted by a whisky and soda, we cheered up considerably, and buoyed each other up with the many instances we had both read of in which the last day of a shoot had often proved the best.

Personally, I had no hopes of increasing our bag, but I felt sorry for my companion, and did my best to make him believe there was a "good time coming," and by the time we turned in had quite convinced him, and half

persuaded myself, that our luck was about to take a turn for the better. The night passed, however, without a call or cry of any kind to indicate the presence of any game.

The " shikari," too, had been alert all night, but had heard nothing. However, I kept this information—or rather want of any—to myself, and assuming as cheerful a manner as I could, we started out as usual, on what I fully believed would be another weary round ending in a blank.

I had decided on beating a jungle we had hitherto left untouched, which ran along the banks of a dry " nullah " or watercourse. To understand clearly what follows, it is necessary to explain that the " nullah " itself was what in the rainy season would be a rushing torrent from twenty to thirty feet broad, with almost perpendicular banks rising to a height of some twenty feet.

On one of these banks was the jungle I had decided to beat. The shape of it, however, owing to the configuration of the bank, made it an extremely difficult one to beat, so before putting in the beaters I took the " shikari " and, walking along the dry bed of the stream, saw that at a bend about the centre of the jungle there was an open gap some fifteen feet wide, and almost opposite this spot, about 150 yards from it, was a natural pass, which any animal driven out by the beaters would be likely to make for.

I also found that the jungle, though continuing again after the gap, did not extend to more than two hundred yards, and ended at this pass. It was obvious, therefore, that the pass was the best place I could occupy ; but this was easier said than done, for the banks on either side of it were very steep, and after examining it thoroughly I found the only way I could take up my position was by clinging round a tree, which stood about three-fourths of the way up, with my left arm, and digging my toes into the soft clay of the bank—a most uncomfortable position, but good enough, I thought, for so large a target as a " sambhur."

Behind this place, on the opposite bank of the nullah, was another favourable spot, commanding the end of the jungle to my right. This being the safer and more comfortable position of the two, I placed the doctor here, telling him to shoot to his right and left only, as I was to his direct front.

Having thus posted ourselves, I sent the "shikari" to the beaters, who were collected at the far end of the larger jungle, with instructions to bring the line down as straight towards us as the nature of the ground would allow of. I kept the "shikari's" son—a young lad about seventeen—with me, hanging on as best he could to my tree, with my second gun.

As I stood now the gap or open space before mentioned was almost direct to my front, and the strip of jungle, mostly grass, extending from it in a curve and ending about fifty yards on my right; the banks of the "nullah" at the pass being much lower than elsewhere, the ground from the edge of the jungle to where I was suspended, as it were, sloped considerably, affording me a better view than I would otherwise have had.

The beaters had entered the jungle and been at work about ten minutes when I heard a curious purring sound in front of me, and turned round to the "shikari's" boy to ask what it was. But before I had time to put the question, he called out in a terror-stricken voice, "Bagh!" * and, slipping down the bank, bolted along the bed of the "nullah," taking my second gun with him!

At the same moment I saw the tiger come out into the open patch. He saw me at once, and stopped for an instant, then with an angry snarl, turned slightly to his left and entered the strip of grass jungle to my right, and sneaked along the edge of it, showing a yellow patch here and there where the grass was lighter. To follow his movements, I had now to keep turning to my right—a most difficult thing to do in my cramped and insecure position.

However, by dint of sticking my toes well into the bank and using the tree as a fulcrum, I succeeded, after a fashion, in keeping the tiger in view. Presently he reached the end of the grass, and, emerging from it, was making for the other crossing some little way behind me, when he suddenly caught sight of the doctor, who was guarding this passage from the opposite bank, and seeing his retreat cut off too here, with a savage growl of disappointment and rage, changed his direction and came trotting directly towards me.

* Tiger.

I could see from the expression of his face that he meant mischief, and was preparing to give him, or rather her—for she proved to be a tigress—as warm a reception as I could, when, quick as thought, she crouched down for a spring, as she got about fifteen yards from me. My position was now an exceedingly unpleasant one, for the tigress was by this time somewhat to the rear of my right, so to face her, I had to twist my body right round the tree and put the whole of my weight on to my left arm, which strained the muscles to such an extent that I feared cramp would set in.

Moreover, as the ground sloped from the edge of the grass to the bank, over which I was, so to speak, suspended, the tigress was considerably above my level. The only advantage of this position was that it gave me a clear view of her chest and throat. However, there was not much time to think, for the moment she crouched I felt I must either fire or follow the example of the "shikari" boy.

But it was too late to do that now. The tigress would be on to me before I could reach the bed of the "nullah," so, bringing my left arm still further round the tree, I raised the rifle to my shoulder and, aiming for the throat, fired in the hope of killing her instantaneously—this being, I considered, my only chance. For a moment the smoke obstructed my view, but as it cleared I saw, amidst a cloud of leaves and dust, a paw raised in the air, and immediately afterwards the body of the tigress—whether dead or alive I could not tell—rolling down towards me.

To remain where I was, therefore, was but to court certain death, or at best a severe mauling, for in the direction she was rolling nothing could prevent her coming right on to me, when, if still alive, her natural impulse, setting malice aside, would be to clutch me, if only to arrest her fall. Thinking, therefore, that discretion in an emergency of this kind was decidedly the better part of valour, I let go my hold of the tree and slipped down into the "nullah," where I fortunately landed on my feet.

I now ran as fast as I could along the bed, and round the bend, where I joined the doctor and "shikari" boy, who had taken refuge with him, and inserting a fresh cartridge at once, awaited in this comparatively secure position, the

approach of the tigress, which I conjectured, if alive, would certainly follow me along the bed.

After about five minutes of anxious watching, however, nothing appeared, nor could we hear any sound coming from the scene of my late perilous encounter, so with our rifles at the ready and full cocked, we walked along the edge of the bank round the bend, and soon, to our intense delight, saw the tigress lying apparently stone dead, just below the tree where I had stood.

We threw a few stones at her to make sure she was really dead, and, as there was no movement, clambered down the bank and found her, sure enough, as dead as Julius Cæsar, with my Alpine stick—which I now remembered having stuck into the bank close to the tree—lying under her and covered with teeth and claw marks, showing pretty plainly that the tigress was by no means dead when she reached the tree, which she must have done a few seconds after I left it.

We measured her between two uprights, one at the tip of the nose, and the other at the end of the tail, and found she taped nine feet six inches, almost a record for a tigress, so I felt not a little proud of having bagged her on foot, and with only one shot. My bullet I found had hit her in the throat slightly to the right side below the gullet, and lodged in the top of the left shoulder, thus inflicting a fatal wound, but evidently not causing instantaneous death, as I had hoped, judging from the marks on the Alpine stick.

I fully realized now what a providential escape I had had from death, for had the tigress reached me she would most assuredly, in her dying agonies, have inflicted injuries which in all human probability must have ended fatally, as I would not have been in a position to protect myself, and could not have looked for any assistance from my friend, who was too far off and, being hidden from view, was, as I subsequently ascertained, quite ignorant of what was going on. However, it was only another instance of the old proverb "All's well that ends well," and our sombre reflections of what might have happened were soon dispelled in the contemplation of the grand trophy we had secured, and now lying at our feet.

The "shikari" and the beaters were most jubilant over

our success, the former declaring most emphatically that he had suspected all the time that there was a tiger in this particular beat! which, to say the least of it, was about as unblushing a falsehood as ever man uttered, and of which I soon convicted him by asking, "Why the something, then, had he allowed me to place myself in so extremely awkward and unsafe a position?"

Of course, he had no excuse to offer, and as the beaters, too, who had been carefully examining the body, and had found from some unmistakable signs that the tigress had a cub or cubs with her, were also naturally incensed at the danger to which they had been exposed, the poor man had rather a bad time of it on the whole. However, the "bukshish" I gave him, and them—which was in proportion to the joy I felt at bagging the tiger, added to the comparatively rare distinction I had achieved of shooting it on foot—soon restored peace, and after making a long but fruitless search for the cubs, we started for camp, jogging merrily along, with the tigress slung on a stout bamboo and borne by about twenty men marching behind us.

Our way lay past the ridge where I had wounded the "sambhur" on the previous day, and as we approached the spot we saw a large crowd collected, and, on going up to inquire, found that these men, induced by my offer of a reward, had been tracking up the wounded stag all the morning and about an hour previous to our arrival, had found it lying dead inside a heavy bit of cover, with one bullet-hole through the fleshy part of the chest and another through the right buttock.

Curiously enough, one of the hind legs had been eaten completely away, evidently by the tigress, as the jungle in which the body was found was not far from the one out of which she was originally beaten. I secured the head, which was a fair one, but the skin was too badly clawed and bitten to be of any use, so I handed it over to the finders, together with the carcass and promised reward.

Continuing our homeward journey, we arrived in camp at about 8 p.m., when we received quite an ovation from the villagers around, and were soon surrounded by an admiring and excited crowd of men, women, and children,

all eager to see, and if possible touch, that dreaded beast the "bagh," a terror familiar to all by name, though few of them had ever seen one dead or alive; but as this exhibition, unless personally conducted, would probably mean the loss of some of our valued trophies, especially the whiskers, I thought it advisable to bring the entertainment to an early close, more especially as we were anxious to have the skin removed as soon as possible. So, leaving Karram Sing to superintend the skinning operation, we went off to our tents and dinner.

We sat down to the latter meal, cool, clean and refreshed, about 9.30, and though we were not much more than half an hour over it, there seemed so much to talk about afterwards, that, in spite of the hard day we had spent, it was long past midnight before we sought our beds.

The next morning we broke up our camp early, and, with a last regretful look at the jungle, wended our way, slowly and reluctantly, back to the station, where we arrived in due course, and, relating our adventures, were for some days the objects of envy to our friends, some of whom had been so sceptical as to our chances of success when setting out on our expedition, and had even tried to dissuade me from going. But, as I have always held that to become a successful sportsman one must never despair, but take all disappointments as part of the day's work, and trust to better luck next time, I had turned a deaf ear to all such discussions, and fortunately, as the sequel proved.

CHAPTER XXVI

I HAD arranged to spend Christmas with a civilian friend named M——, who was now in charge of a sub-division of the district—a large but sparsely populated tract of country, being covered for the most part, in those days, with dense jungle, through which I had been camping for a week before reaching my friend's bungalow.

This was a curious-looking structure which, except for its wooden posts, seemed to be constructed entirely of bamboo, the walls and even ceilings being composed of this useful reed, while strips of it, woven into matting, covered the floors.

Here, some fifty miles from the nearest European, my friend had lived his strange solitary life for nearly two years, and he still seemed to enjoy his solitary existence. The reason, however, became apparent later when, on going over the house with my host after breakfast, I saw the hunting trophies which adorned the bamboo walls. There must have been nearly a hundred heads and skins of almost every species of wild animal to be found in those jungles, but mostly of tigers and such beasts as are dangerous to human life and village cattle.

And yet, strangely enough, my friend had never been a sportsman till posted to this place ; but, finding the work was light, and time consequently hanging heavy on his hands, he had taken to shooting, at first merely as a pastime. This taste, however—evidently inherited from his father, a sporting old Indian colonel—had gradually developed till, judging from results, he was now as efficient with a rifle as he was by reputation one of the ablest officers of his service.

His case was a curious corroboration of the hereditary theory, especially with reference to the new competitive

"SHIKARIS" AND TROPHIES.

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system of selection for the Indian service, then being much discussed in India, and I remember thinking at the time how much more fitted a man with such tastes and temperament was to fill the position he held than the possibly cleverer, but often physically inferior, weak-sighted bookworms, of whom too many had already been appointed to the various civil services of India.

Here, for example, was one who, because he happened to have been born a sportsman, was constantly on the move, visiting parts of the district most difficult to get at, and thus coming into close and constant contact with people whom he would not otherwise have met, and therefore able to judge things for himself instead of through the medium of the possibly faked reports of his subordinates—to say nothing of the good he was doing by ridding the country of every tiger, bear or leopard that he came across in his wanderings through those unfrequented wilds where no European had ever been before.

Nor, later on, when camping with him through his charge, had I any reason to alter my opinion, for at every halt we made, whether for one night or a week, the villagers would come flocking round him with their grievances, which he would discuss with them and remedy, if possible, at once, and in his turn elicit from them all the tittle-tattle of the village.

Thus, combining business with pleasure, we had been touring together about a week, and had encamped one day near a village bordering on an unusually heavy jungle. It was Christmas Eve, and, having just dined, we were finishing our pipes and final jorum of hot grog, prior to turning in, when a villager was announced with the welcome intimation that he had brought " khubbur " of a tiger.

A moment or two later, a bewildered-looking rustic, escorted by one of my police-orderlies, and evidently under the impression he was his prisoner for the time, was brought up to the camp fire, round which we were seated, and, balancing himself first on one leg then the other, after the manner of his kind, told us a long rambling story, ending with the somewhat startling statement that the tiger—which, by the way, he had not seen—was over eighteen feet in length !

Shorn of its embroidery, his tale was to the effect that late on the previous evening a buffalo belonging to his father had been killed by a tiger and dragged a considerable distance into some thick grass jungle which lay between his village and the Government forest.

The man excused himself for the delay in giving information on the grounds that he had waited till daylight to make further inquiries, and had then discovered the marks of the pugs, which from their size were apparently those of a large tiger.

As there appeared to be no reason for doubting the man's story—except as to the dimensions of the tiger—and the next day was a whole holiday, we decided to send out the elephants next morning and beat for the beast. Accordingly, giving our informant the usual "bukshish"—to be supplemented later should his information prove to be correct—we confided him to the keeping of my "shakiri," orderly, with strict injunctions to give him a good feed and as much straw as he wanted for his bedding. We then made our own arrangements for an early start—viz. at 5 a.m.—the elephants, with the howdahs and guns, being ordered to go earlier, as the place was distant, and part of the way lay through the dense jungle.

Shortly before the appointed time, two shivering figures, well wrapped in ulsters, for the morning was intensely cold, emerged from our respective tents, and, making a hurried meal of tea, boiled eggs, and toast in the verandah of the tent, mounted the dogcart which was to take us the first five miles, the rest to be performed on a pad elephant through the jungle.

Having accomplished the first stage of our journey, we were not sorry to exchange the dogcart for the elephant, as the so-called driving road proved merely a tracing, the centre being left as nature had created it plus several deep holes, where trees removed by the workmen had originally existed. But with the chance of a tiger at the end of it, we soon forgot the discomfort we had endured.

Shortly after mounting the elephant we entered some long grass jungle, which at times was considerably above our heads, and in places the only way we could proceed at all was in the tracks made by wild elephants, which

were fortunately numerous, and some of them evidently as recent as the night before.

Our progress, therefore, was necessarily slow, and the five miles from where we had left the dogcart to the village we were bound for occupied close on three hours. However, we finally emerged into a clearing, evidently made by the hands of man, and soon sighted a group of huts forming the village—some twenty in all, and occupied by as many families.

We were immediately surrounded by these people, all much excited and talking together in the usual native fashion; but after a time succeeded in restoring order, and picking out the most intelligent member of the crowd, elicited the information that the tiger had been heard calling several times during the night, apparently to its mate. Hence there seemed little doubt that it was still in the vicinity of the "kill," and later on, from the marks of its pugs and other signs, we satisfied ourselves that our informant's story was evidently a true one.

We accordingly convened a meeting, consisting of our "shikari," the owner of the defunct buffalo, two of the head villagers, and ourselves, and discussed as to the best means of bringing the tiger out to the guns, finally deciding that the cover was too big for our limited number of elephants to beat with any prospect of success.

We next resolved to try and locate the "kill," and then, should there be a suitable tree handy, to build a platform on it and watch over the carcass, in the hope of the tiger returning to it when all was quiet, later on. This being arranged, M—— (my chum) and I mounted a staunch elephant and, accompanied by our "shikari"—a good tracker—followed up the trail into the long belt of grass, which, becoming higher as we advanced, finally developed into grass and tree jungle combined.

We were proceeding through this slowly and with some difficulty, when suddenly the elephant stopped and gave a shrill scream. At the same moment there was a slight movement in the jungle to our front as of some animal sneaking away, and, urging the elephant forward, we came upon the dead buffalo, portions of which had been recently eaten.

Evidently the movement we had noticed was made by

the tiger, whom we had disturbed at its morning meal, so we now looked about for a tree; but the only suitable one we could find was some hundred yards away from the "kill." Here was a difficulty we had not anticipated, and we were puzzled for some time how to get over it, but our ever-resourceful "shikari" was equal to the occasion, and came to the rescue with a suggestion as unique as it was simple, but clever nevertheless.

I am perhaps wrong, however, in describing it as unique, for it savoured something of the plan said to have been adopted by Mahomet in his difficulty with the mountain, his proposal being that since the tree could not be brought closer to the "kill" why not tie the latter to the elephant and drag it nearer to the tree?

"What! handle the carcass?" we exclaimed simultaneously, all our book-gained knowledge up in arms against a suggestion which, in our ignorance, we believed if carried out would most effectually prevent the tiger from returning to the "kill." However, the "shikari" evidently knew better; but, too respectful to contradict us, replied that he did not propose to touch the carcass, "nor is it necessary to do so," he continued, "for we can throw a slip-knot round the horns, which will be tightened as the elephant moves on."

As there seemed no other way of accomplishing our object, we consented, and soon had the gruesome remains in tow, at the end of a long rope, and finally deposited it in a comparatively clear spot, about twenty yards from the tree and well in view from its branches.

We then set about constructing the "machan," or platform, as quickly as possible, on the lower branches of the tree, having come provided with rope and bamboos for this purpose, and soon had a fairly substantial platform ready, and about twelve feet from the ground.

We now covered it over with grass and small branches, and, carefully removing all trace of our work, took up our position, sending the elephant away, with strict orders not to cross the "drag" lest the tiger be put off from following up the scent—an unnecessary precaution, as we soon found, for the smell from the decaying carcass was far too powerful for even an elephant to destroy.

CHAPTER XXVII

By the time all our arrangements had been completed, it was already two o'clock, and yet we sat on patiently till four, keeping as still as our cramped position would admit of, when, about an hour later, a crowd of parrots suddenly rose from a neighbouring tree, and, circling around it for a time, screaming loudly, eventually flew off.

Almost immediately after this was heard the sound of a soft but heavy footstep cautiously approaching us from this direction. Unfortunately, just at this moment, a red tree ant bit me on the hand, and, in trying to shake it off, I brushed against some leaves, causing a slight noise.

Immediately the footsteps ceased, and, after a moment's pause, were heard again, but now going away from us till they seemed to die away in the distance. However, about twenty minutes later, during which time we had sat in almost breathless silence, we heard them again approaching. Judging from this that the animal, whatever it was, had not as yet detected us, we held our breath, and, with our eyes riveted on a small gap in the jungle, anxiously awaited its approach.

Nearer and nearer came the sound of the footsteps, till I could see the jungle slightly waving, and the next moment I caught a glimpse of a large tiger in the gap, crouched almost flat with the ground, evidently sneaking up towards the "kill." There was no time to fire, nor would it have been advisable to do so, for it was hardly a second passing the gap, and there was every reason to suppose we should presently obtain a better shot as it emerged into the clearing.

But, alas! there was no such luck in store for us, for although we remained up in the platform till the sinking sun warned us it was time to go, we neither heard nor saw it again that day. It had evidently detected us in the

tree, and with the stealth and cunning of its kind, sneaked noiselessly away.

A shrill note now on M——'s whistle—the signal we had arranged—soon brought up our elephant, and, climbing down from our perch on to the pad, we rode back to the village, where we ordered the other elephants to encamp, as we had decided to try for the tiger again next day.

Continuing our homeward journey, we had a somewhat alarming experience in the forest, for as we retraced our steps through the dense jungle, in the fast approaching darkness, we could hear a herd of wild elephants, quite close to us, tearing down the branches and crashing through the jungle all around us. Had we come face to face with any tusker, of which there are generally several in the herd, the consequences might have been most serious. Fortunately we got through without any such encounters, and eventually arrived safely at the dogcart.

The drive home, however, was an experience quite as perilous as the other, for although we had our lamps, they only accentuated the darkness, and how we avoided the holes we had seen by daylight is quite beyond my comprehension, but was probably due to the instinct of the horse.

The next morning we made an even earlier start, reaching the jungle village shortly after nine o'clock, to find that the " shikari " had already investigated the jungle on an elephant, and was now awaiting us with his report. It appeared that the tiger had evidently had a good feed during the night, or had removed a portion of the kill, for at least half the bullock had entirely disappeared. Thinking, therefore, that the beast, being gorged and consequently sluggish, would be likely to be lying up quite close, we decided to beat through the grass at once.

We had only six elephants in all, so, forming these in line with a " howdah " on each flank, we commenced " quartering " the grass—for with such a small number of elephants it was useless to attempt beating it all at once. We had done a little more than half, having been some four hours about it, when the elephant I was on, a staunch, reliable animal, suddenly stopped dead and commenced kicking at something in the grass, making at the same time

THE "THARU" AND HIS CHARGE.

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that peculiar rumbling sound which, in a well-trained animal, means that it has scented some beast, alive or dead.

We halted the line at once, but could see nothing for some time. At last the mahout, a " Tharu " from the " Terai "—in other words, a hunter by birth and training —suddenly slipped off the elephant, and, groping for a moment in the grass, held up what appeared to be a monster ham, wrapped neatly round with several layers of grass.

Taking off the wrappings, we discovered to our surprise a hind-quarter of the buffalo. The mahout was most jubilant, declaring that " as it had been removed by the tiger a long distance from the rest of the kill, it was a sure sign that it intended coming back to eat it, or would not otherwise have concealed it so carefully."

Very fortunately, it happened there was a large tree a few yards off. So, carefully replacing the " ham " where we found it, wrapped up in its original coverings, we soon rigged up a " machan " on the tree, then adjourned for lunch outside the jungle, for we knew the tiger, if it came back at all, would not do so till the evening. It was three o'clock before we had finished lunch, and half an hour later we took up our position in the tree; but for the first hour or so nothing of any interest happened, and the silence we were obliged to observe was becoming almost unbearable, when its monotony was relieved by watching the birds returning to roost in the trees around us, and fighting for the perches.

One lot in particular specially attracted out attention from their extraordinary behaviour. This was a flock of crows flying low and close together, with heads all bent downwards, watching something in the grass below them. Every now and then they would flap their wings and, cawing loudly, shoot suddenly up into the air in evident excitement, then, hovering for a while, down they would go again. This went on for some time till they were over a small stream about thirty yards to our right. Here they settled on a tree, and, from their loud chattering, appeared to be discussing the situation; then, suddenly taking wing again, flew off towards the heavier jungle.

We were much puzzled to account for their strange

conduct till the " shikari," who was with us, explained in a low whisper that it must have been some animal they had been following, and, seeing it pass or stop underneath their tree, they had suddenly taken fright. His conjecture proved correct, for a minute or two later we heard a loud splash in the river, followed by the sound of some large animal lapping up the water, and, being now sure it was the tiger, we were naturally much excited. However, another hour of silent waiting passed, with not a sound to relieve the monotony of it now, for the birds had settled down on their respective trees, and were apparently all asleep or, perhaps awed by a sense of the tiger's presence, had ceased their noisy chatter.

The sun, already behind the trees, was now fast approaching the horizon, and we knew that another hour of daylight was all we could expect, when suddenly a peculiar sound, as of a cat purring, was heard seemingly quite near us. Soon it seemed so near that we imagined the animal producing it must be underneath our platform, yet we did not dare to look over for the slightest movement on our part at so critical a moment would have been fatal.

Presently the sound ceased, as suddenly as it had started, but was followed immediately by a low, snarling growl, accompanied by a quick movement in the jungle on M——'s side of the " machan," and the next moment the head and shoulders of a huge tiger protruded from the cover, its head turned in the direction of the " ham."

By this time M—— had cautiously brought up his ·577 to his shoulder, and while the tiger was still fastening its eyes on the tempting morsel before it, the sharp crack of the rifle woke up the silent forest. The tiger, with a roar of agony and rage which might have been heard a mile off, fell heavily forward, shot through the shoulder, then raised its head a moment, and seeing us, evidently for the first time, struggled to its feet. With another appalling roar, most terrifying in the intensity of its ferocity, it tried to charge our platform, and, falling again in the attempt, lay growling savagely till a merciful bullet through the brain from M——'s second barrel, put an end to its career.

DELIGHTED VILLAGERS

The shots brought up the elephants as previously arranged, but before they arrived upon the scene we had already descended from our perch, and were busy examining and measuring our prize, which proved to be an unusually massive tiger, 9 feet 8 inches from nose to tip of tail. To lift this huge carcass on to a pad elephant, we found no easy task, for it must have weighed near 500 lbs., However, we managed it at last, and with the great beast half covering the elephant it was tied on, returned in triumph to the village.

We received quite an ovation from the villagers, to whom the death of the tiger was a matter of vast importance, meaning not merely immunity from further loss in cattle, but also release from the terrible apprehension lest the beast should suddenly take to man-eating—as sometimes happens when a tiger has hung about a village long enough to lose its fear of human beings.

This time, although we started later, our journey back through the forest was unattended with adventure, possibly because we were now so large a party. Neither did we tempt Providence again by driving in the dark, preferring the slower but safer mode of transit afforded by the elephant. Consequently, it was late when we reached the tents, but the strange events we had been witnesses to that day had given us so much to think and talk about, that, late as was the hour, we sat up around the camp fire discussing them.

The extraordinary and almost human intelligence displayed by the tiger, moreover, had recalled to my friend's mind another, and even more remarkable, incident he had once witnessed, in which the sagacity shown by the animal concerned was so much more extraordinary that but for his having been himself the spectator of the scene, I could hardly have credited the story, which I now repeat.

It appeared that one afternoon some months before, he was sitting in the verandah of his tent, watching his elephants, which, picketed under some trees about fifty yards distant, were standing in their usual listless attitude, and picking occasionally at the branches in front of them provided for their consumption. Presently from under

one of their tarpaulin tent-like shelters a mahout came out, and, throwing another branch or two to his particular animal, a huge tusker, sauntered off in the direction of the bazaar—the favourite afternoon resort of all his kind.

Some half an hour later another figure emerged from the shelter—this time a woman, and presumably the wife, carrying an infant in her arms. Going close up to the "tusker," she made it a low "salaam," and, putting the child down before it, "salaamed" again; then, spreading a blanket she had with her on the ground, placed the sleeping infant in the centre of it and well within reach of the animal's proboscis, and "salaaming" again, but more ostentatiously, went off in the direction taken by her husband.

Presently the child awoke, and after a while, commenced crawling towards the edge of the blanket, seemingly unnoticed by the elephant, but had hardly gone a foot or two when the huge beast, stretching out its trunk, gently pulled it back into its original position. The child, apparently not in the least alarmed, lay still for a time, but soon attempted another excursion, though with no better success, for out stretched the trunk again, and as gently as before drew back the would-be explorer to its place. Again and again did the latter, with infantile persistence, attempt to extend the sphere of its investigations to realms beyond the limit of its blanket, but only to be replaced by its watchful guardian on the spot whence it had started till, as if realizing the unequalness of the contest, it abandoned its attempts at exploration, and lying quiet for a while gazing up at its huge nurse, finally dropped off to sleep again.

The mother returning shortly afterwards, picked her infant up again, and, with a final but more emphatic salutation to the elephant, as if in acknowledgment of the service it had rendered, retired into the shelter. Obviously the animal had "done this trick" before, but how had it been taught to perform it independently, without word of command? The mahout's explanation that both he and his wife having known the beast so long, it understood all they said, hardly solved the problem, for

even professional performing animals will only do what they are told to at the time.

It was an interesting question, but the enormous mental effort required to find the answer so nearly ended in our dropping off to sleep, that we decided to postpone the operation till our brains were more capable of bearing the strain.

CHAPTER XXVIII

ANOTHER week's camping with my friend brought us to the limits of his domain, where we halted a couple of days together then parted, as my tour now lay through a portion of the district outside the limits of his charge, to which his touring was confined.

* * * * *

It was strange to think that for the next eight months perhaps—but for an occasional visit from some passing official—he would see no European nor even speak his own language except to his English-speaking clerk. Yet such is the life many an Englishman in India is forced to live, and should he, unlike my friend, not be a sportsman —or stationed where no sport is to be had—his life must necessarily be a dull one, for however interested a man may be in his work—as most are—still work without some relaxation becomes monotonous after a time, hence is apt to be ill done. Besides, in a country teeming with dangerous animals, sport, in the sense of shooting, is not the mere killing for amusement as it is in Europe, but on the contrary practically a necessity for the protection of the people, who have no means of protecting themselves—much less their cattle—from the ravages of these beasts.

During the course of my tour, for example, it was no uncommon occurrence, while marching through or halting near a village, to find the people in a panic-stricken condition owing to a tiger or a leopard, as the case might be, having taken up its position in some adjoining jungle, whence it would carry off a bullock or calf at night time, and in these circumstances the sudden appearance of one not only able but willing to wage war against the beast, was, as may be imagined, hailed with considerable delight, for they knew that even if I failed to kill the animal,

RELAXATION.

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the mere fact of taking my elephants through the jungle was sufficient to scare the brute away. Many were the leopards I obtained thus while on tour, and a tiger or two occasionally, but these were rare events—red letters, in fact, some of which have been already chronicled, and others will be in their turn.

Three of these leopards I remember shooting one morning before "chota hazri," and within half a mile of the camp. I had been told on my arrival the day before, that a leopard had been prowling round the village for some days. Now, as it so happened, I had recently been the victim of one or two false rumours as to the presence of a leopard—based on the fact of some villagers having heard one calling for some nights—and on this occasion as there was but one small patch of grass jungle near the village, I was not inclined to act on this information.

My sporting orderly, however, after inspecting this bit of grass, reported that he had seen some crows hovering over it, as if watching the movements of an animal within, and suggested that a goat should be tied up near the cover as a bait, which if taken, would keep the beast there. I approved of this suggestion, and as a goat was not available, procured an old, mangy village cur, which we tied up before dark just outside the grass. This may seem a cruel thing to do, but as the poor brute, besides being eaten up with mange, was half paralysed and almost blind, I felt less compunction than I would otherwise have done.

The next morning early, mounting one of my elephants and accompanied by the other to act as beater, I soon reached the spot, to find the dog had disappeared, but from some drops of blood on the ground there was little doubt as to what had happened. Sending the other elephant round to the opposite end of the grass, I entered it at once. Following what seemed to be a recently made track, my elephant had barely gone ten yards, trumpeting and rumbling as it advanced, when I saw a leopard's head pop up, and fired at it once.

The next moment the animal appeared again a little further off and stood for a few seconds exposing its head and shoulders. I fired again, but with more deliberate

aim, and saw it fall, and halting the elephant was about to get off, when to my amazement it got up as I thought and crept stealthily away through the grass to my right. I brought up the rifle instantly and fired again but thought I had missed, for though the beast spoke to the shot, it went on. Following quickly, however, I soon came upon it once more, lying under a bush, close to where I had first seen it—as I imagined—and evidently hit, for no sooner did it see the elephant approaching than it charged, roaring savagely.

For the next few minutes we had quite an exciting time —the beast charging again and again in spite of being hit once or twice, till a lucky bullet through its head put an end to the contest, which was one of the fiercest I have ever had with a leopard. This time I waited a while to make sure it was dead before dismounting to inspect and measure my prize—a process with most sportsmen next in importance to securing it—and parting the grass with my rifle, was making my way towards the carcass when I stumbled over what I took to be an ant-hill.

Picking myself up, I examined the obstacle more closely, to find, instead of an earthen mound, another leopard lying dead! The two bodies were within a yard of each other, the one I had fallen over being evidently that of the first I had fired at, for there was one bullet hole only, in the back of its head, while the other, as I expected to find, had several.

But this was not the only surprise in store for me that morning, for while I was examining these two bodies, I heard the beating elephant—which was now coming towards me—stop suddenly, begin to trumpet and squeal, and a moment later the mahout shouting loudly that there was another leopard lying dead in front of him! Scarcely crediting his statement, I rushed through the grass to where the elephant was standing, and there, sure enough, saw what I now guessed to be the leopard I had seen fall, and such it proved to be, for the only shot hole in the skin was one through the shoulder, at which I had taken such very deliberate aim.

The mystery was now fully explained. The first shot I had fired—which, by the way, was the luckiest fluke I

ever made—had dropped the leopard dead, and the second and third animals—both of which I had taken to be the first—had each been killed in the manner I have described; the only surprising part of the business, therefore, was that there should have been three leopards in a patch of grass barely large enough to harbour one.

A few days after this strange adventure, my solitary wanderings were ended for a time by a sudden meeting with the District Magistrate, whose camp I came upon unexpectedly one morning. I had sent on my tents the night before to a village some twenty miles ahead, and on arriving there myself, found them pitched near several others belonging—as I discovered—to the magistrate, who, accompanied by the Executive Engineer, had arrived there the day before.

I had met both these men during the six weeks I had been in the station after joining, and had been much interested in the latter as being by reputation the finest big-game sportsman in the Province. He was, moreover, noted as having been the victor in one of the most terrible hand-to-hand encounters with a tiger that ever man survived. I had heard of the incident at the time and had long wished to know the details, but it was not a subject he cared to talk about—as was only natural, having lost an arm in the struggle. However, one night while we were sitting round the camp fire after dinner, discussing the pleasures and perils of tiger shooting, he told us this strange story of his adventure.

" I was once out tiger-shooting on foot, with my friend the doctor of the station. Towards the close of the day we came upon, and, as we thought at the time, mortally wounded a tiger, and mounting the only elephant we had, were following him up. Being the beginning of the cold weather, the jungles were so extremely dense that it was difficult to see more than a yard or two ahead.

" We had entered a specially heavy bit of tree and undergrowth, through which the elephant could hardly make his way; however, by breaking down the branches of the larger trees, and uprooting those of smaller growth, we managed to advance, though very slowly. We had

penetrated the cover about twenty yards or so, and were pushing our way through a tangled mass of trees and creepers, when, with a roar that seemed to shake the ground, the tiger was on to us.

"The elephant, an untrained, timid beast, stopped suddenly, and, turning quickly round, shot me head foremost on to the tiger's back.

"Stunned for a moment by the fall, I cannot quite say what happened immediately afterwards, but when my senses returned to me, I found myself being dragged along by the left arm, which the tiger held between its teeth. Strange as it may appear, I felt no bodily pain; the terror, inspired by the helplessness of my position, seemed to have paralysed my feelings in that respect, but the mental anguish I endured baffles all description, for no words of mine could adequately express the horror and despair which filled my mind.

"I had lost my rifle as I fell, and alone, and, as I thought, unarmed, entirely at the mercy of my savage captor, to be killed and eaten at his leisure—perhaps to be devoured alive!—my position could not well have been a more hopeless one.

"The jungle, as already mentioned, being very dense, the tiger had some difficulty in dragging me through it. Moving his grip from time to time to obtain a better hold, he had finally seized me by the shoulder, my arm resting against its side.

"And now comes the strangest part of my adventure, illustrating, as it does, how a fact, quite unimportant in itself, may yet prove of the greatest value, and just make the difference between life and death.

"Overcome by the hopelessness of my position, I had resigned myself to my fate, and was actually longing for the end to come, when suddenly I felt under my hand, which the tiger had drawn against its side, the beating of the animal's heart. With that sensation there came to me the recollection of something I had forgotten.

"The sudden fall, followed by some moments of unconsciousness and the subsequent awakening to the awful situation in which I found myself, had clouded my mind. Having lost the rifle, I had thought myself unarmed,

but I now remembered that I carried a loaded pistol in the holster of my belt.

" It was a double-barrelled weapon of enormous calibre, and fired at such close quarters might kill the brute at once, but even if it failed to do so, my position could hardly be more desperate than it was already.

" The jungle was growing denser every moment, and it was evident the tiger could not drag me much further. I had, therefore, no time to lose, for I felt that when he stopped he would at once begin to maul me.

" My right hand was hanging free, and with it I tried to find the holster, but a muffled growl and a more savage grip upon the captive arm warned me to desist. I tried again, more cautiously, and succeeded in unbuttoning the flap.

" I knew that to draw the weapon out would require some force which might again excite the tiger's rage, and hasten his attack, but I was desperate now, and with the courage of despair I seized the butt and pulled.

" The next moment the pistol was in my hand, and cocked. The tiger growled and bit more savagely than before, but with the newborn hope within me growing stronger every moment, I cared nothing for his rage, and, placing the muzzle close to where my left hand rested, I pulled both triggers at once.

" The sound of the explosion must necessarily have been considerable, but was drowned in the deafening roar with which it was accompanied. The next moment I received a violent blow across the face, and then a ponderous weight seemed to come crashing down upon me, and I remembered nothing more.

" When I came to my senses I found the tiger lying beside me, and my friend bandaging my arm, which was now extremely painful.

" He told me that he had seen the tiger seize and drag me off as the elephant bolted, and, as soon as he could stop the panic-stricken beast, had followed in our tracks, to find the tiger and myself lying side by side, both apparently quite dead !

" Happily it was the tiger only that was dead. Both bullets had passed through the heart, and death must

have been practically instantaneous, otherwise he would certainly have killed me in his dying struggle.

" The blow he dealt me as he fell had torn my face from ear to ear, and the arm he had held between his teeth was bitten through and through, the flesh and bone being almost reduced to pulp.

" It had subsequently to be amputated, and it was only due to the weather being comparatively cool that I eventually recovered, but it was a miraculous escape, and an incident in one's life not easy to forget."

The " big-game " sportsman of the present day, confident in the death-dealing qualities of his modern rifle, would do well to learn a lesson from this tale, for too often is he apt to overlook the fact that in a rough-and-tumble encounter with dangerous game, a rifle may be dropped, and that he would then find the human fist but a poor weapon when opposed to teeth and claws.

Often has the writer heard old sportsmen, whose experience should have made them wiser, deride the novice for carrying a revolver in his belt, little thinking that such ridicule might some day cost the younger man his life.

AN ENCAMPMENT.

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CHAPTER XXIX

VERY pleasant were the days I passed camping with the magistrate and his friend the sporting engineer, who despite the loss of his left arm was still an excellent shot; utilizing the rails of his howdah as a rest, he had by constant practice acquired the art of using his rifle with one hand as efficiently as before, and seldom missed an animal to his front or on either side of him.

The mornings from sunrise till late breakfast about mid-day, were devoted to our respective duties—either of inspection, or in the hearing of reports; and the afternoons to feather shooting, often combined with local inquiries or investigations. This was our daily routine, except on rare occasions—such as now to be recorded—when a tiger or leopard was reported, in which case, from early dawn to sunset, the day was spent in the scarcely less important task of ridding the neighbourhood of a pest as obnoxious to the people as a burglar or "dacoit."

One afternoon as we rode into a new camp, the first news that we were greeted with on arrival was that one of the "baits" had been killed the previous night.

Being too late to do anything that day, a beat was arranged for the next morning. Some hours before sunrise the beating elephants were sent out to the cover, and took up their position as silently as possible, being placed so as to drive towards the forest, as it was unlikely the tiger could be induced to break in any other direction. Soon after dawn the howdahs with the three sportsmen arrived, and were posted at intervals within the edge of the forest, concealed, yet commanding the comparatively clear strip of ground between them and the isolated jungle. The intervening space, being about 120 yards wide, would give the guns a fair sporting chance.

The "shikaris" having posted the howdahs and duly

noted their positions, returned to marshal the line, leaving the sportsmen to complete their final preparations, such as placing rifles and cartridges handy, cutting down twigs and branches that might be in their way, etc., and to while away the weary hour or so that must pass before the beat would begin as best they might.

Time, as is usual on such occasions, dragged wearily on. At last the welcome sound made by the elephants crashing through the heavy cover was heard in the distance, and presently a low prolonged rumbling, resembling the approach of an earthquake, came from the right of the advancing line—an indication that some of the elephants had already scented the tiger; and a few minutes later a loud coughing roar, followed by a general squealing, trumpeting, and commotion all along the line, told that he was afoot.

The excitement was now intense, and what with the noise made by the elephants, the shouts and yells of their drivers, and the occasional roars from the tiger, the jungle for the time being was a veritable pandemonium. All this time the occupants of the howdahs, as may well be imagined, were on the very tenterhooks of expectation, each eagerly scanning the space within his vision. Soon I, being to the extreme left, observed a quick, sinuous movement in the comparatively light grass fringing the cover in front of me, and shortly the head and shoulders of a large tiger showed for an instant. The next moment, with a roar of rage and defiance at seeing its retreat cut off, he had turned sharp to his left and was galloping down through the grass fronting the howdahs.

The pace he was travelling at, and the close assimilation of his black and yellow markings to the lights and shades of the surrounding grass, made him anything but an easy target. Nevertheless, I emptied both barrels on him. He held on, however, apparently untouched, receiving a similar salute as he passed the next howdah. But he had still to pass the last one, which, unfortunately for him, was occupied by C——, the engineer, the safest shot of the party, who, taking advantage of a small bit of open about 90 yards in front, which the tiger was bound to cross, waited till he had reached it; then, aiming a full length in front, fired,

rolling him over in his tracks. The shot, considering the distance and pace, was an excellent one; but alas! it struck too far back to be fatal, and the tiger, quickly picking himself up, stumbled on and gained the shelter of the forest.

The line was now brought up and sent into the forest some distance behind where the tiger had entered, and directed to beat about the edge in half horseshoe formation, the right flank being well advanced, with one howdah accompanying it, the left resting on the forest edge.

The other two howdahs were posted some 500 yards in advance. The line advanced, but its progress was necessarily slow, the forest being dense, and in places almost impenetrable; but by dint of tearing away thorny creepers, breaking down branches and such trees as they were able, the elephants managed to make some way, and had proceeded about 200 yards without showing any signs of uneasiness, when one or two elephants on the extreme right commenced rumbling; this was taken up by the others, and soon a roar, followed by the rush of a heavy body ahead, was heard, and almost before there was time to realize that the tiger was again afoot, he was charging the line. Fortunately the dense tangle prevented his travelling fast, thus giving B——, the magistrate, who occupied the flanking howdah, time to stop him with a shot, which apparently took effect, for acknowledging it with a savage roar, the brute turned and disappeared into the thicker cover. The beating elephants, with the exception of two steady tuskers, completely demoralized by this sudden onslaught, had turned and bolted, but were now brought back, and the line being reformed, again advanced, but were once more put to flight by the tiger. Again and again was the attempt made to drive him forward, but always with the same result, till finally the elephants were reduced to such a state of disorganization that in spite of threats and persuasions they refused to advance again.

The battle had now raged for more than an hour and a half, and yet there seemed no immediate likelihood of a surrender on the part of the tiger, nor any prospect of his either succumbing to his injuries or being forced to

move forward, it was decided to attack him with the howdah elephants, aided by the two steady tuskers—a fairly dangerous undertaking considering the state of his temper and the practically unassailable position he occupied; but matters were growing serious, and the sun extremely hot. The other two howdahs were accordingly called back, and some of the line elephants being put in their places as stops, the attack was resumed.

The three howdahs now advanced in a close line, separated by a tusker, the tiger all this time growling savagely, but remaining invisible, for strangely enough he had suddenly changed his tactics and now refused to charge, thus complicating matters considerably. However, as it was obviously necessary that he should show himself, taking up my shot-gun, I fired it into the jungle. The effect was instantaneous, but scarcely in accordance with my wishes or expectations, for I had hardly resumed my rifle when the tiger, with one mighty bound, sprang fairly on to my elephant's head, and with its fore claws round its ears, and the hind embedded in the trunk, clung there, growling savagely, with ears laid back and lips curled up —a striking picture of savage fury!

In the meanwhile the elephant, maddened with rage and pain, in its frantic efforts to free himself of the unwelcome burden, nearly dislodged both myself and the mahout. Indeed, I could only maintain my position by squatting down in the howdah. How I contrived to hold on to my rifle as well, and, full-cocked as it was, prevent its going off, is a mystery yet to be solved; to make any use of it under the circumstances was, of course, quite impossible, and the struggle, if continued, must eventually have resulted in some serious disaster. Fortunately, the elephant, wearied with its efforts, ceased for awhile. Seizing this opportunity, I stood up, and, holding on with one hand, fired my rifle, pistol-wise, full in the tiger's face, now scarcely three feet from my own. To miss at such extremely close quarters was hardly possible, and the tiger, releasing his hold, dropped off stone dead, the bullet having lodged in his brain.

I had now time to look around me, and, much to my surprise, found that my own elephant and one of the

tuskers were the only members of the attacking force present—the rest nowhere to be seen. I shouted out the news of the tiger's death, and soon, crashing through the jungle from different directions, came the runaways, all bearing unmistakable evidence of what had occurred. C—— was minus his hat, his jacket torn to ribands, his howdah at an angle of 45 degrees, and his face bleeding from scratches. B—— was in an equally dilapidated condition, the crown of his pith hat gone, and his howdah front stove in. The tusker's mahout had fared somewhat better, coming off with the loss of his turban only. Each had a different story to tell, but the salient points being similar, they may be related in a few words. It appeared that as soon as the tiger made his spring, the two howdah elephants and the nearest tusker, panic-stricken at his sudden and furious attack, turned tail and fairly bolted, tearing through the forest utterly regardless of branches, thorns, or creepers, and nearly sweeping the howdahs off in their anxiety to get as far away as possible from the angry, snarling brute. They were eventually pulled up by the jungle becoming too dense to allow of further progress, and though every effort was made to bring them back to my assistance, they refused to move so long as the tiger's growl was still audible.

Thus ended a glorious day of pleasure and perils combined, the last, though apparently forgotten, yet unconsciously recalled to mind when enjoying the recollections of the first.

CHAPTER XXX

Once more alone—for I had parted with my companions some days before—I was continuing my lonely tour, so pleasantly interrupted, when one morning on my way to inquire about a man-eater (tiger) said to have decimated a village near my camp, I came unexpectedly upon another white man, evidently as lonely as myself, riding a Bengal "tat." *

He proved to be an Austrian Roman Catholic missionary priest, living practically as a native in the very village I was bound for, and from the conversation I had with him—which, by the way, was conducted in Bengali, being the only language mutually understood—I ascertained that the story of the man-eater had, as usual, been much exaggerated, two people only having been killed by the beast, which, moreover, had not been seen or heard of for some weeks.

The priest dined with me that night, and though we conversed in Bengali as before—my knowledge of German being limited to "Ja" and "Nein," and his of English equally restricted—I could see that he was a man of birth and breeding. He told me some details of his present life, and how he lived in an ordinary native hut, which was also the church, without servants, punkahs, or ice, or even bread.

In these circumstances I was not surprised to see him enjoying his dinner as much, if not more than my companionship, and afterwards, when I gave him a cigar, it was so distressing to me to see the pleasure he derived from it, that I presented him with the box. He declined my offer of a shake-down for the night, but the next morning, as I was starting for my next encampment, he appeared, riding the same pony—a miserable

* Small pony.

NEWS OF THE "MAN-EATER."

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specimen of horse-flesh about twelve hands high, which the village magnate, a recently made convert, had presented him.

As I bid this extraordinary zealot adieu, I little guessed the fate that was in store for him, for some years later—long after I had left the district—I read of his death in the papers, describing how while riding home one night, he had been carried off by a man-eater and devoured, possibly the very one we had discussed.

Continuing my inspectional progress through the district, I arrived in due course at the northern extremity, bordering on the independent territory of Nepaul, where I halted for some days to confer with the Nepaulese authorities in pursuance of a co-operative crime-prevention scheme I had in view. My camp was pitched about a mile from the frontier, and the boundary line being merely marked by pillars, without any river or other natural obstruction, the bad characters residing on the other side had easy access into British territory, where they committed burglaries and, recrossing the frontier with their spoil, were safe from pursuit.

One bright moonlight night while asleep in my tent, I was awakened by the moon shining on to my face, and saw that the corner of the tent, close to my bed, was open, and my portmanteau gliding, apparently of its own accord, in the direction of the opening. No sooner had I recovered from my surprise, than, guessing what was happening, I seized my revolver, and jumping quickly out of bed, rushed out through the door of the tent, just in time to see the naked figure of a man disappearing into some jungle. I called to him to stop, but, as I might have known, receiving no reply, fired two shots at him, fortunately, perhaps, without any effect, for although I was probably justified in firing, had I killed or wounded him, there might have been some trouble later.

I left the following day on my way back to the station, and while halted at one of my encampments *en route* was visited by an European "zemindar" * residing in the neighbourhood—an ancient individual, named H——, well known in the district as the oldest European inhabitant,

* Landholder.

and also for his sporting reputation. With the hospitality of his class and time, he insisted on my returning with him at once and putting up at his house during my stay. I accepted the invitation willingly, and for the few days I stayed there was royally entertained, his establishment being conducted in the good, old Anglo-Indian style.

The house was almost palatial as to size and the magnificence of the furniture, while the walls of the dining-room and verandahs were covered with the heads and horns of the various animals he had shot. I noticed, however, that although the collection of trophies included every animal to be found in the Indian jungles, there was not a single boar's head amongst them, nor were there any hog-spears among the many weapons of destruction which also graced the walls. I might not have noticed these omissions had I not heard of his pig-sticking exploits—duly chronicled in the old numbers of the " O. S. Magazine "—and, wondering why he had kept no trophies of these feats, I asked him one day. His explanation was a long one—quite a narrative, in fact—but to my mind one sufficiently interesting and unique to justify its length, for a more curiously pathetic tale I had seldom heard.

It seemed that he had commenced life as an indigo planter, and, like most men of his calling, had taken to pig-sticking early in his career, and being by nature a good horseman, soon became proficient at this fascinating sport. As time went on, and with it promotion, he was able to keep up a good stud, amongst them an Arab gelding named Mustapha—the pick of his stables and the best pig-sticker of them all, yet, with the irony of fate, destined to be the cause of his master abandoning this sport.

One hot April morning, as he was sitting smoking in the verandah, his attention was attracted to an individual coming sidling up towards him in the manner peculiar to the native when desirous of speaking to the " sahib." Finding himself discovered, the man halted in front of him, standing on one leg, which he kept rubbing with the other.

" Well, what is it ? " inquired H——, wearily, expecting to hear one of the endless complaints he was accustomed to receiving.

The man made no reply, but with a profound salaam, which nearly upset his equilibrium, laid at H—— 's feet a bundle he carried in his hand. A loud squeal as he deposited it betrayed to some extent the nature of its contents.

" A present sent for the ' Huzoor,' " * he observed at length; and, undoing the many wrappings, produced a small animal, which from its shape was apparently a pig. And so it was, but a pig such as the young planter had never seen before, for it was whitey-brown in colour, and striped from head to tail with orange-coloured lines, altogether as weird-looking a beast as it is possible to imagine. As a matter of fact, it was a young wild boar, which the man had captured, and, wishing to please his " sahib," had brought it for his acceptance. H—— took the proffered gift, for he could not well refuse it.

For some days it proved a troublesome acquisition, but after the first week or two it gradually grew tamer, and followed him about as closely as his dogs. It increased rapidly in size, and when about nine months old, was quite a respectable-sized boar. By the servants and other natives in the factory, he was called the " jungly soor," † afterwards contracted to " Jungli," a name by which he was subsequently known, and to which he answered when called. He was very popular with his four-footed companions, especially with the Arab ; and, strange as it may seem, the " pig-sticker " and the pig formed a close alliance.

Eighteen months went by. The boar was now full-grown, and with a formidable pair of tusks presented a most truculent appearance, though, in point of fact, still gentle as a lamb. But sad times were in store for him, for one unlucky morning the manager of the head factory, while driving past the bungalow, encountered him on the road. His horse, appalled at the unwonted sight, promptly swerved and bolted, and but for a friendly ditch, which stopped both horse and trap, the consequences might have been disastrous.

But they proved serious enough so far as the unhappy Jungli was concerned, for a " manager " in those days was a most important person, and not one to be trifled with,

* Master. † Wild pig.

much less upset into a ditch, especially if portly and irascible. So H—— was promptly ordered to keep the beast confined. A sty was therefore hastily constructed, and into it the boar was with some difficulty introduced, but he resented the confinement, grunting his disapproval till far into the night. The next morning the sty was found in ruins, but of the occupant there was no sign whatever, for Jungli, evidently indignant at " the liberty of the subject " being interefred with, had departed in the night.

A month or so later, the young planter was one evening seated at the dinner table, when suddenly a tremendous uproar was heard outside, and from the loud barking of the dogs it was evident some wild animal was prowling round the bungalow. Jumping up quickly, he seized his gun and, slipping in two cartridges, went on to the verandah, when, by the light reflected from within, he saw a huge, gaunt, mud-covered creature standing on the walk, surrounded by the dogs. Presently the animal caught sight of him, and breaking through the yelping crowd, came galloping towards him. But, strange to say, H—— felt no fear, for even in that dim, uncertain light something in the appearance of the animal had struck him as being familiar. A moment later the beast was close beside him, and, putting a cold, muddy nose into his hand, looked up into his face. There was no room for further doubt, for, as he had already guessed, the gaunt, mud-beplastered beast was Jungli !

Examining him closer, H—— found an arrow-head embedded in the muscles of the shoulder—some native hunter's arrow, of which the shaft had been broken leaving the head inside. He extracted it at once, though not without some difficulty, and dressed the wound. It healed up in time, and, well fed and cared for, the animal recovered. His friendship with the Arab was renewed, and the two seemed faster friends than ever. But the love of a roving life, inherent in the beast, and perhaps increased by its late wanderings, was, apparently, too strong to be resisted, and one morning the sty was again found broken, and Jungli once more absent without leave. All the country round was searched, but to no

purpose, and for many days after H—— felt his loss most keenly. The horse, too, seemed equally distressed, showing his grief as plainly in his own way.

Some months after this event a friend from a neighbouring factory came over for a day's "pig-sticking," and being anxious to test the merits of Mustapha, it was agreed that he should ride him that day. The next morning, accompanied by some coolies and the dogs, they tried a jungle near the bungalow, and no sooner had the beaters entered it than an enormous boar broke nearest to the visitor. Giving it time to get well into the open, he let Mustapha go. Then, with a loud "tally-ho," started in pursuit, H—— following for all that he was worth; but his mount was no match for his Arab.

The boar at first seemed ignorant that he was the object of pursuit, till the thud of hoofs coming nearer, apprised him of the fact, when, disdaining to run further, he suddenly pulled up, and turning quickly round, charged down upon the horse. The latter, as eager for the encounter, quickened its already racing speed, and soon the two were within ten paces of each other. The spear was already poised, and a moment later would have been delivered, when suddenly both horse and pig stopped dead.

Face to face, with scarce a yard between them, they stood as if rooted to the spot. In vain its rider urged Mustapha on. He would not move a step, while the boar, too, seemed as unwilling to advance. Again the rider urged his horse, but still the beast refused. At length, in desperation, he dug the spurs into its sides. The horse, which had never felt the spurs before, now bounded forward, and in one mad plunge landed beside the boar. Still the latter did not stir, but, as if wondering at its action, stood gazing at the horse. The next moment the spear, raised for an instant, descended like a flash, piercing between the shoulders of the boar. It was a well-delivered blow, practically instantaneous in effect, for the stricken beast rolled over and lay motionless on its side.

To H——, looking on, the conduct of his Arab seemed strange and unintelligible, for never before in such encounters had it displayed any timidity. However, urging his horse on faster, he soon arrived upon the scene, and

seeing the boar was dead, dismounted to inspect it. It was the largest he had seen, and, pulling out his tape, he bent down to measure it. The next instant he sprang up with a cry and stood gazing at the carcass with horror-stricken eyes. Then, bending down again, he examined it more closely, only to find his fears confirmed. For there, close where the spear had entered, was the other wound, healed over and scarce visible, yet too obviously the one inflicted by the arrow he had extracted.

The beast his friend had slain was, alas! no ordinary wild boar, but Jungli, whom he had lost and searched for in vain. All that had been unintelligible was now as clear as day. The two animals had recognized each other, and neither had been willing to advance to the injury of the other. From that day—now some twenty years ago—H—— had not only given up pig-sticking entirely, but, lest he should be reminded of the incident, had destroyed all his heads and given away his spears.

AN INDIAN WILD PIG.

[*To face page* 236.

CHAPTER XXXI

I HAD now, after five and twenty years' experience of Indian jungle life, tried every method known and usually employed by Indian sportsmen in the hunting of big game. But I was destined to discover yet another before my shooting days were over. I take no credit for discovering this new method—if such I may call it—since its discovery was an accident, due rather to necessity than to any efforts of my own.

The circumstances that led to its adoption were quite simple, though excessively annoying at the time. Encamped on one occasion in the wildest portion of my district, I was interviewed one evening by a deputation headed by the " mundle " of a village about twenty miles from my camp, requesting I would be so good as to come and shoot " some tigers ! " which had been killing their cattle for some weeks.

This news, specially as to the plurality of the tigers, was very pleasing, that is, from my point of view. Unfortunately, as it so happened, neither of my two elephants was available at the moment, one being on the sick list and the other employed on important official business many miles away. Yet I felt that should the information be correct, it was obviously necessary that some steps should be taken at once. My first business, therefore, was to test the men's statements by an inquiry on the spot—a suggestion which I was glad to find received with unanimous approval, the headman offering to place a new empty hut in the village at my disposal for the night, thus relieving me of the necessity of sending out a tent. Accordingly, despatching a servant with bedding, pots and pans, etc., in a bullock cart overnight, also a pony to be left half-way, I started the next morning, wondering as I rode along how I could best accomplish the destruction of these tigers—for I had

made up my mind to bag the lot should the information prove to be accurate.

According to the story there had been some kills quite recently, but how to locate these without elephants was a problem which rather stumped me at first, especially as the jungle was said to be enormous and very dense. Finally, after considering the subject from every point of view, I decided the best way would be to procure some buffalo—calves, if possible—and tie them up as baits, and, in the event of one being killed, to sit up over the carcass on the nearest tree that I could find. Having thus settled the knotty question, as I thought, and knowing that it would take some time to make all the necessary arrangements, I urged my pony on, and in due course reached my destination, much pleased with my plan, and quite confident of success.

I had no sooner arrived than I had ample evidence as to the presence of some dangerous animals in the vicinity. The village seemed as if peopled by the dead. Though some hours yet to sunset, not a soul was to be seen about. The door of every hut was firmly closed, but if a dog barked in an excited manner, or a pig squealed more loudly than its wont, instantly from within each hut arose the din of loud wooden clappers, gongs, tom-toms, and every other hideous sound that the ingenuity of man, woman, and child could produce. This disconcerting noise lasted all that evening, and at intervals during the whole of that night, rendering sleep, or any hope of it, an absolute impossibility.

Next morning I interviewed my host, the aforesaid village " mundle," and found that here fortune had much favoured me, in that he proved to be Mahomedan, and hence not troubled with any scruples in the matter of supplying an old cow or two to tie up as " baits "—for a consideration, of course. We soon came to an arrangement that he should put out two or three that evening, receiving five rupees per head for any that were slain. Had the man been a strict Hindu, no inducement that I could offer, pecuniary or otherwise, would have persuaded him to do such a thing, and I would perforce have had to wait for the next ordinary " kill."

Having passed the day as pleasantly as I could in my confined and uncomfortable quarters, as evening approached I went into the jungle and superintended the placing of the " baits." Then, explaining to the villagers that, with food thus provided for them, the tigers were not likely to attack the village, I induced them to go quietly to sleep, and so enjoyed a more restful night myself. Early the next morning the man deputed to visit the " baits " returned with the news that one of the cows could not be found. Making a hurried breakfast, and taking my rifle with me, and some men, I started off to seek the missing cow. On our way we came across the fresh track of three tigers, showing distinctly in the patches of white sand which occasionally crossed our path. The tracks were evidently of two full-grown tigers, probably a male and female, and one half-grown cub. Arriving at the tree near which the missing cow had been tied, we found a piece of broken rope, and also that the grass around had all been beaten down in a circle, and stained here and there with blood. Leading from this circle in the direction of the heavier cover beyond, was a broad, tunnel-like path, freshly made through the high grass, and following this up for some fifty yards or so, we came to very heavy jungle of creepers, prickly pears, and thick bush about eight feet in height. In the midst of this, and half concealed from view, was the carcass of the cow. Its neck seemed broken, and there was a deep wound in the throat. Here was a difficulty I had not anticipated, for that the tiger might break the rope and drag his " kill " so far had not occurred to me. The spot in which the cow now lay was invisible from the tree near which it had been tied, and there was no other tree or bush close by on which I could sit and watch the " kill." However, the opportunity was too good to be lost, for I felt sure the tiger would return; so, forcing my way through the thick growth by which we were now surrounded, I worked round in a circle till I came upon the hollow stump of what had once been a tree. It was a mere shell of bark, about two feet in diameter, and some five feet high, an ideal watch-tower from which I could see yet not be seen. I found I could get comfortably inside it, and, by placing a stool to stand upon, my arms would be free

to shoot with ease. This stump was only some fifteen feet from the carcass of the cow, yet so dense was the jungle between that I could not see it till I had a lane cut through the tangle of creepers, grass, and bush which intervened. Having completed these arrangements, I would fain have commenced my vigil at once ; but wiser counsels prevailed, and, finally convinced that the tiger was not likely to revisit its " kill " till evening approached, I returned reluctantly to my hut.

The morning dragged wearily on ; midday came, and passed as slowly by. At length the afternoon arrived, and about three o'clock, accompanied by two men carrying my rifle, a blanket, and the all-important stool, we set out for the stump. By four o'clock my companions, having seen me comfortably ensconced within my shell, had retired to join the crowd assembled in the open some quarter of a mile away, and I was now the sole human occupant of that vast and gloomy forest, where all around was still and silent as the grave. Afraid to stand upright, lest the tiger should sight me as he came and turn away, I crouched low down, trusting to my ears alone to warn me of his approach, for surely, thought I, in a deathlike silence such as this a rat could scarcely move without being heard.

An hour or so passed, and darkness was coming on apace, yet I had not, so far, heard any sound save the gentle rustling of the leaves to the light breathing of the wind, which occasionally arose and quickly died away again. Anxious to know the time, I looked at my watch, and had, with some difficulty, just made out that it was nearly seven, when, suddenly, I heard a sound like the loud grinding crunch of cracking bones, a few feet away from me. Taken completely unawares, I nearly dropped both watch and rifle in my amazement, but recovering myself with an effort, I held my breath, and, slowly raising my head, peered through the lane that had been cut. For a few seconds, during which I could feel my heart thumping against my ribs, I could see nothing. At length, my eyes becoming accustomed to the gloom, I was able to distinguish a large shadowy form, with head lowered over the carcass of the cow, and then a long tail waving slowly to and fro, its tip some eight feet or nine feet from me only.

I felt sure that the object before me must be one of the three tigers, and thankful to find I had only one to deal with, I brought my rifle to my shoulder ready to fire as soon as I could select a fatal spot. The animal now raised its head, and, turning it to one side, stood in an attitude of attention. There was no longer room for any doubt. The short, fluffy ears, huge flat head, and powerful neck were all too unmistakable. It was indeed a tiger, and apparently a monster of its kind, for the whole outline was now distinct, and in that more than semi-darkness, probably looked larger than it was.

I was just about to fire at the neck, so temptingly displayed, when fortunately, I remembered having once been warned never to make the slightest movement when a tiger is on its "kill," unless it is actually engaged in eating, so I refrained. With bated breath, and heart beating as if it would burst, I stood rigid as a rock, watching the huge beast. At last, to my intense relief, the head went down again and the crunching was resumed. The next instant, aiming just below the shoulder-blades, I pulled the trigger. Then came a scene needing an abler pen than mine to describe. A blinding flash lit up the gloom, followed by a darkness more oppressive than before. Then a hoarse, appalling roar which seemed to shake the earth, succeeded by a gnashing of teeth and beating of bushes all around and about me, as if a dozen tigers were engaged in mortal strife all round my stump. So rapid and violent were the movements of the evidently stricken beast, and so close did it at times approach my tree, that, expecting every moment to be attacked, I seized the "dao" (a short, sharp Bengali knife) I had stuck into the stump. In the hurry and excitement I grasped it tightly by the blade, cutting my fingers, as I afterwards discovered. For a minute or two, which to me seemed hours, the commotion round my tree went on; then there was a quick rush through the grass, followed by a heavy fall, another violent struggle, and all still and silent as before. Presently from the village there arose the same unearthly din of clappers, gongs, and tomtoms I have described before. In vain I shouted for the villagers to come up with lights; my voice was drowned in the loud clamour that they made.

Now, as the prospect of getting out and looking for the tiger with a match did not appeal to me, especially as, for all I knew, it might still be alive, I fired off both barrels of my rifle in quick succession, and, taking advantage of the lull that this produced, shouted again. At length, after what appeared to me an interminable time, a large body of villagers, carrying torches and armed with spears, approached, when, to my intense delight, I saw the tiger lying dead close to the spot where I had heard it fall. My bullet, I found, had entered behind the shoulder an inch to the left of the spine, and made its exit through the chest—a mortal wound which ought to have caused death sooner than it did. It was a fine, full-grown male, of more than average size, and heavy withal, for it took ten stalwart rustics to lift and sling it on to a pole. We marched back in triumph to the village with our prize, the villagers fairly yelling in their joy, and reviling the dead beast for all the mischief it had wrought, in language more forcible than polite.

I had just had the carcass bestowed in a safe place for skinning the next day, when some of the men who had been loitering behind came running up, and informed me that the tigress had followed her dead mate, and was standing in the middle of the road not one hundred yards away. Delighted at the news, I hurried to the spot, but only to find I was just too late, for the tigress, after standing a few moments, bewildered by the glare of the torches and the frightful uproar that her appearance had created, had dived back into the jungle, which at that particular spot came right up to the road. Next morning, having skinned the tiger and rubbed the skin well over with arsenic paste, I was cutting off some portions of superfluous fat that still remained, when I noticed a man pick up a piece I had thrown aside, and put it in his cloth. Curious to know what he was going to do with it, I asked him, and he informed me that his child was ill, and tiger fat being considered a most potent medicine, he was going to administer it internally. Needless to say, I deprived him of the " drug " at once, explaining why the tiger, though now dead, was dangerous still. That night, and for two nights following, cows were again tied up, but no more were killed. The tigress had evidently moved off, probably to seek another mate.

FOUND DEAD.

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CHAPTER XXXII

EARLY in the cold season of 189–, H——, the district officer, and myself were on a tour of inspection through a remote and lonely portion of our district, visiting the villages and police posts on the frontier which were few and far between, and separated from each other by large tracts of dense and almost impenetrable jungle, said to be infested with tigers and leopards, besides other big game. The former, indeed, had given ample proof of their presence in the locality by frequently raiding the adjacent villages and carrying off the cattle of the villagers. Our arrival, therefore, at many of these villages was hailed with considerable delight, as we had a fairly good line of elephants with us, which we were using as transport, the roads in these jungle tracts being mere tracks through the forest, and unsuitable for wheeled traffic. Knowing, before we started from headquarters, that we were likely to find good sport, we had brought our guns and rifles and a goodly supply of ammunition, dispensing with many luxuries in the shape of superfluous provisions and extra comforts in the way of camp furniture to make room for them, for when transport has to be done entirely by elephants it is often necessary to sacrifice comfort and reduce one's impedimenta to the smallest possible dimensions.

During the first week and until we reached the confines of the forest, we had fairly good sport in our marches from one camp to another, but our daily bags consisted of feather, viz. partridges, floriken, and ducks, with an occasional couple of snipe or brace or two of quails, though on one or two occasions we were more fortunate, and bagged a few hog deer. But on nearing the forest villages we soon began to hear rumours of recent "kills," though for some time were unable to locate any of them definitely enough to make it worth our while to halt longer than the one day.

To me this expedition had more than ordinary interest from a sporting point of view, as, shortly before starting on it, I had, after considerable thought and many doubts and misgivings, made what I considered a very important change in my " battery," for, led away by the glowing descriptions and extremely neat and handy appearance of the weapon, I had disposed of my " trusty and well-beloved " double-barrelled ·500 Express, and purchased a ·303 L.M. magazine carbine, with a supply of cartridges loaded with the much-spoken-of and highly recommended Jeffery bullet. My companion, who was an old and very experienced big-game sportsman, was much amused when I produced what he was pleased to call my " toy-rifle," and asked me whether I really and seriously contemplated facing a tiger with this pop-gun, and when I answered him in the affirmative, could see that he considered it a highly dangerous experiment. However, as I had a pair of ordinary double-barrelled 12-bore ball guns as well in my howdah, he strongly advised me to use them instead, and reserve the L.M. for deer and other such harmless animals. But as I had already used the little rifle, and with only the soft-nosed bullet, too, against deer, with most satisfactory results, I had quite made up my mind to try it and the Jeffery at tiger *coûte qui coûte*, for the rifle was so very light and well-balanced, that I found I could make much better snap-shooting with it than I had done with the comparatively heavy Express ; therefore, if it proved as powerful as the latter, it would, I considered, necessarily be a better weapon for howdah shooting, where weight and rapidity of fire are such very important factors.

But to return to my story. Our first camp, actually within the forest tract, was near a large straggling village on the borders of the forest, and only separated from it by a belt of dense grass jungle, some three to four miles in length, the different village homesteads being scattered over this distance. The camp was pitched in comparatively open country. While sitting smoking after dinner on the first night of our arrival, we heard from time to time, apparently within three or four hundred yards of our tent, the hoarse, guttural call of a leopard, which was evidently prowling round near the cattle-pens in the

village, and later on, towards dawn, the stillness of the camp was broken by the loud notes of a couple of tigers calling to each other not very far away. Accordingly, when we met the next morning, instead of sending our camp on as we usually did, we decided on remaining where we were for a day or so, for in addition to the promise of sport, we had a good deal of work in the vicinity of this particular village, which we set about disposing of at once, so as to be free for a good beat the next day. We had been working hard, therefore, all day, and, just before dusk, were starting for a stroll to the village when suddenly we heard a tremendous shouting and yelling from this direction, and some of the villagers soon came running to the camp, wild with terror and excitement, to tell us that a cow had just been carried off from a field about a mile to the west of our camp. This, while sad for the unfortunate owner of the cow, was glorious news to us, and, though too late to do anything that evening, there was still sufficient light to investigate the matter. We accordingly hurried to the spot where the cow was alleged to have been seized, and soon had ample evidence of the truth of the story, for there was the broken rope by which the animal had been fastened to a small tree, and pools of fresh blood, which in themselves would have been sufficient to indicate what had occurred ; but in addition to this there was a newly made broad lane through the grass leading in the direction of a large clump of mixed reed and grass jungle, through which the carcass had evidently been dragged, and following this up for a few yards we came to a small stream, on the soft muddy bank of which were unmistakable "pugs," which from their size were apparently those of a large leopard or small tigress. There was no time for further search, nor was this necessary. We had ascertained all that was requisite, viz. that there had really been a "kill," and where it had been dragged. We accordingly returned to our tents and dinner, and, giving orders for the elephants to be ready early the next morning, retired to bed in a most contented frame of mind at the prospect of the pleasant morning's work before us. By 7 a.m. we had mounted the howdahs and were off to the cover, which we found to be, on further examination, a strip of heavy grass

and reed jungle about a half mile long, running along the banks of the river and connected with the main portion of the larger belt of grass by an isthmus of thick scrub jungle, sufficiently dense to conceal the movements of a leopard or even a tiger, in passing from one piece to the other. As the strip was not very broad and we had some eight or nine elephants, we determined to beat from the forest side towards the open, feeling sure that our " line " would be too closely packed to allow of the animal breaking back without being discovered ; but to make quite sure we decided to have one howdah with the line and the other on the right flank of the beating elephants, and to move about twenty yards in front of them along the edge of the grass. We drew lots for choice of position, and H——, winning, decided in favour of the flanking howdah. The line had scarcely entered the jungle when a waving of the grass about thirty yards to my right front attracted my attention, and a few minutes later I heard both barrels of H——'s Express fired in rapid succession, followed by a quick movement in the grass across the line and about fifty yards ahead of it. I did not fire, as the grass was too high, and the animal travelling too fast. A moment later the mahout of the beater elephant, on the extreme left of the line, called out, " He is crossing the river," but instead of doing so the leopard—for such it proved to be—had entered a very thick clump of reed and scrub jungle growing on a sand bank in the centre of the stream. We followed as quickly as we could make our way through the thick long grass, and were about to take the line across when we found that between us and the island there was a " great gulf fixed," for the stream, though only 18 inches deep, and to the island only some 10 feet wide, covered a dangerous quicksand, in which even the smallest elephant we had (a young one, about 5 feet high) sank up to his knees and struggled out with the greatest difficulty, shrieking with terror. We knew the leopard was there possibly wounded, and there he would remain until forced out, and we had no means of forcing him ! Our only comfort was that he could not get out from the other side without being detected, as the country was open in that direction for some distance, with cultivation here and there. The opposite bank of

the river, moreover, was crowded with villagers, who had come out to " see the fun," so we were sure if he broke at all, it would be back to the original cover. We accordingly took up our position facing the island, and, having collected several bags of large stones, loaded them on the beating elephants, and, sending them down to the water's edge, as near as they dared to go, commenced a fusillade into the jungle, each mahout throwing stone after stone into it till his supply was exhausted, but without any result. We then fired charges of No. 6 repeatedly into the scrub, but that, too, had no effect.

Suddenly one of our " shikaris " conceived the happy idea of burning him out, and this plan was no sooner suggested than adopted. We put the elephants in requisition again, and, helped by the villagers, had soon collected a quantity of dry reeds and jute stalks, which we tied roughly up into large torches. Then, throwing some large branches, grass, and reeds across the stream, made a temporary causeway over the quicksand, sufficiently firm to bear the weight of a man. By this bridge we crossed over some thirty men under the protection of our rifles, each man carrying about a dozen of the extemporized torches, and when all were across we formed them up into line with torches alight, and at a given signal they yelled with one accord, at the same time throwing their lighted torches as far as they could into the jungle, yelling all the time. The other torches were now thrown in as fast as they could be lit, and in a short time the whole jungle was ablaze, and the flames roaring and crackling in a manner that was more than feline nature could endure, and out rushed what we now saw was a huge leopard, so close under H——'s elephant that it swerved and spoilt his shot, though he managed to get off both barrels. Being somewhat further off, my elephant was steady, and gave me a better shot. Now, thought I, was a chance for a trial of the L.M. I had picked it up as the leopard rushed out, and, bringing it quickly to the shoulder, fired just as he was about to enter the original cover. He was going a tremendous pace, so I pulled well in front of him ; then, telling the beaters to beat back slowly, H—— and I urged our elephants on, and took up our position at the isthmus connecting the two

grass covers, but we had hardly settled ourselves when we heard shouts of delight from the line, and soon made out the words, " He is dead." However, we stood fast for awhile, thinking he might only be wounded, and perhaps get up and attempt to slink past us. Presently, however, one of the beating elephants came up through the grass and its mahout informed us that the leopard was lying stone dead a foot or two from where he had entered the jungle. Never thinking for a moment that I had hit him, as the shot I had was a very difficult one owing to the pace the animal was going at and the very transient view I had had of him, I congratulated H—— on his good luck, and, putting the leopard on one of the pad elephants, sent him off to camp, while we went on beating for partridge and floriken and anything else that we might find.

About 6 p.m. we returned to camp, and, of course, proceeded at once to inspect our spoil and to superintend the skinning, and we then discovered that there was only one bullet hole through the neck, about a couple of inches behind the root of the left ear. The hole was so small that we doubted whether it could have been produced by a ·500 Express bullet, so we cut the neck open and to my surprise and delight found embedded in the vertebra of the neck the small L.M. bullet with the base quite perfect, but with the nose, and three-fourths of the rest of the bullet, beautifully mushroomed. Close to this also was the nickel-silver casing with the base of the case intact, but the upper portion distorted and sticking out at right angles, like the blades of a screw propeller, with the edges as sharp as a knife. Examining the wound further we found that although the hole at which the bullet had entered was no larger than the diameter of the bullet, from that point to where the latter and its case were found was literally bored out into a canal about 1½ inches in diameter, with the flesh on all sides reduced to a pulp. H—— was astonished at the appearance of the wound, and said that were it not for the conclusive evidence afforded by the presence of the bullet and nickel casing found inside it, he could not have believed that such a small and harmless-looking projectile, fired from such a " pop-gun " of a rifle, could possibly have inflicted so ghastly an injury, and from

that day forth his feeling of contempt for the little rifle changed to profound respect and admiration.

But little did we think its present performance was so soon to be eclipsed by another of still greater magnitude. I was naturally much pleased with the little rifle, for apart from the effects of the shot, I felt sure I could not, under the circumstances, have made so good a one with a heavier weapon, and was, therefore, more than ever determined to try it at tiger on the first opportunity, and this came sooner than I expected. Our work being over, we had no excuse for prolonging our stay, and accordingly started early the next day for a village some fifteen miles distant. As the march was to be almost entirely through forest, we determined to move in line, with the baggage as equally distributed, and as securely packed as possible on the beater elephants. About 12.30, having accomplished about half our journey, we halted for lunch under the shade of a grove of trees outside the forest, and while discussing it the elephants were ordered to go into the jungles and pick up what they could in the way of lunch for themselves. They had been gone some little time when we saw the small one hurrying towards us as hard as its little legs could carry it, with its driver urging it on, gesticulating violently all the time and appearing much excited. We walked forward to meet him, and were informed that hunting about inside a small strip of scrub close to the forest they had suddenly come upon the carcass of an enormous bullock, evidently just killed, and only a very small portion of it eaten, lying in a patch of small but very dense grass close to the river bank, and that from the behaviour of the elephant, the animal, which was probably a tiger, judging from the size of the bullock killed, was evidently close by.

We lost no time in getting the elephants together, and proceeded quietly towards the place indicated, and H—— and I and the two "shikaris," leaving the elephants some little distance off, got down and walked cautiously towards the spot where, sure enough, lay the body of a huge bullock, almost warm, and beside it, on some soft clay, were the pugs of a tiger perfectly fresh. There was no reason for further search, so, retiring as carefully as we had approached,

we remounted, and, hastily making our arrangements, took up our positions, namely, one howdah at the head of the jungle in which the kill lay, and the other on the opposite bank of the river. I won the toss this time, and naturally selected the former place as the most likely for the tiger to make for, being a small clearing about 30 feet square with heavy covers beyond. It took some time for H—— to reach his position, as the river was deep and the only practicable crossing some half a mile down. In the meantime, I made a careful examination of my position and saw that the open space where I was posted was the end of a narrow strip of grass and scrub, about 500 yards in length, growing along the bank of the stream, which was deep but not broad. The opposite bank was fairly steep, with a pass here and there leading up into the forest, which extended to its edges. H——'s howdah was to command one of these passes. The "kill" lay near the entrance of this strip and about twenty yards inside it. The beater elephants had been instructed to form up into a close line and beat up towards us as soon as they saw H—— in position. After making my observations I placed my elephant behind a thick clump of tall grass near the edge of the river and just inside the heavier cover, from which I could command the whole of the clearing to my front as well as a portion of the river and the open to my right; then filling up the magazine of my ·303 with the Jeffery bullet cartridges, placed it ready for use on the rack in front, and waited with as much patience as I could command for H——'s arrival. I soon had the satisfaction of hearing his elephant crashing through the forest, and shortly afterwards of seeing him posted at one of the passes nearly opposite to where I was. At the same moment the shouts from the mahouts of the beater elephants warned us that the beat had commenced. I knew now that the tiger might show at any moment so, grasping my little rifle, I stood up ready for him. The beat had been going on for about ten minutes, when some forty or fifty yards to my front I noticed a sinuous movement in a patch of grass, caused by some large animal gliding stealthily across the jungle towards the river. This was, of course, the tiger, and I was wondering whether he really intended taking to the water, when suddenly there

was a loud "hough, hough," evidently caused by the animal seeing H——'s howdah, and then a quick rush back, and the next moment I heard him coming crashing down through the jungle towards where I stood. He suddenly turned to the left, and coming out of the cover, trotted along the edge of it, directly on to my position. The next minute he caught sight of me, and, seeing that he was evidently cut off on this side too, with a roar of rage charged furiously down on me. I waited till he was about twenty yards off, then, taking advantage of a dip in the ground, took him as he was rising, and fired at his chest. He fell to the shot, and while trying to recover himself I fired again. He then began a series of acrobatic feats such as I had never before witnessed in a wounded animal. He first reared straight on end, then turned a complete somersault, then appeared to jump with all four feet off the ground, and finally rolled over on his side, righted himself, and began coming towards me, half crawling and half jumping. All this time I had kept on pumping in cartridges and firing as quickly as I could, for I was mounted on what is known as a fighting elephant, and, standing as we were on the brink of a bank with a 10 feet drop into the river, I felt if the tiger reached the elephant it would be a serious matter, but fortunately he paused for a moment, enabling me to place my shot. I accordingly gave him one through the head, which appeared to kill him instantaneously, for he rolled over on to his side, and never moved again.

I jumped off with the tape, and found him to be 9 feet 7 inches and a splendid specimen of a very massive tiger in the prime of life; he had a short tail, or would probably have measured some two inches longer. Turning him over carefully I found he had five bullet holes in him, one in each side of the chest, one in the body far back, one in the right foreleg, and the last through the head. Examining the magazine of my rifle, I discovered I had fired seven shots in all, so had evidently missed twice, which was better than I expected, considering that the tiger was never quiet for a moment after receiving the second shot, and the elephant doing his utmost to get at him all the time, and so unsteady in consequence that quick and accurate shooting was anything but an easy matter. However, here

was a large and powerful tiger stopped in his charge and eventually killed outright with a weapon in size, weight, and appearance more resembling a rook rifle than anything else, and I was naturally more than satisfied with its performance. At the same time I was not so pleased with the rifle as a quick-firing one for howdah use, for I found the fact of having to first lift up and then pull back the breech bolt, decidedly difficult to accomplish in the position, and under the circumstances I was in, and am confident that with a repeating rifle of the Winchester pattern, with its simple lever action, I could have fired half as many shots again in the same time and under similar conditions, given, of course, the same magazine capacity. The L.M. repeating action is no doubt an excellent one so long as the person using it is on foot and has the free use of both hands, but for shooting off elephants, or from a tree or when in any cramped position in which it is occasionally necessary to hold on, the double action of the bolt alluded to above is decidedly a drawback. On the other hand, had I, in the scrimmage I have described, been armed with a double-barrelled rifle or gun, I question greatly whether I could have succeeded in reloading at all after firing the two cartridges in the chamber, for persons who have never experienced it can have no conception how very violent the movements of an elephant can be when he is unsteady and constantly changing front, which communicates to the occupant of the howdah a motion very similar to that of a small boat in a chopping sea. Hence a magazine or repeating rifle with an action easy of manipulation would obviously be the most suitable weapon for use in a howdah, provided they could be made to carry a charge of powder and weight of bullet equal to the ·500 double-barrelled Express, and capable of delivering a shock sufficiently powerful to ensure stopping a charging tiger or leopard, for, in the instance above related, the first shot, though it dropped the tiger and checked him for the time, would not have prevented it ultimately getting home on to the elephant had not the last shot fortunately found a vital spot.

Before experimenting with the L.M. I had previously had considerable experience with a Winchester repeater,

purporting to be a ·500 Express, burning 110 gr. of powder and firing a 300 gr. bullet, and had found this weapon, though less powerful, of course, than an ordinary double-barrelled ·500 Express rifle, very satisfactory when used against both leopard and tiger, though whether it would have stopped either of these animals charging I cannot say, as I never had an opportunity of trying it under such conditions. At the same time, and to quote no less an authority than the late Sir Samuel Baker, so very much naturally depends on the placing of a shot that, supposing the animal to be hit through the head, heart, lungs, neck, or other vital part of the body, it would probably not make very much difference whether the weapon used was a ·500 Express, a Winchester, or L.M. With the last there might possibly be some doubt, owing to the enormous velocity and the small size of the bullet, which, travelling too quickly through the body, might possibly avoid a bone, and thus prevent the impact necessary for the expansion, and so fail to cause a sufficiently serious wound to stop the animal immediately. Thus, it is all the more necessary that the rifle used against dangerous game should not only possess sufficient smashing qualities, but have a repeating action which can be easily and rapidly manipulated in any position in which a sportsman may happen to be placed. There is doubtless a prejudice, particularly amongst Indian sportsmen, against repeating or magazine rifles as a sporting weapon, chiefly arising from the fact that the second shot cannot be delivered as quickly with it as with a double-barrel. That the latter is far ahead of any magazine rifle in this respect cannot for a moment be doubted; but suppose the two barrels, either by reason of bad shooting or from any other cause, fail to stop the animal, and the second gun be not immediately available? This is often the case, more particularly if shooting on foot, when it must necessarily be entrusted to an attendant, probably a native, who may or may not be possessed of sufficient coolness to await the charge of a wounded animal, or the presence of mind to leave the weapon behind him, should he be of opinion that absence of body would be more in keeping with the situation, and make a bolt of it, leaving his unfortunate employer to do the best he can. Now,

with a magazine or repeating rifle the sportsman need never be placed in quite such a hopeless predicament, assuming, of course, that he has taken the very ordinary precaution of filling up his magazine beforehand, for with a weapon capable of delivering ten or fourteen shots in as many seconds, he should at least be in a position to make a fight for his life and, if he keeps his head, with a very fair chance of success; whereas, with a double-barrel only, in the event of the two shots failing to stop the animal, he would in all probability be badly mauled if not killed outright, as it is unlikely under the circumstances that he could extract the old and insert fresh cartridges in sufficient time to be of any use. Hence it is obvious that in an emergency of this kind the magazine rifle possesses qualities too valuable to be lightly disregarded. Conservatism in sporting weapons, and prejudice against innovations, are all very well in their way, but it should be remembered in this connection that new inventions are often the outcome of sound practical experience, and that the one in question probably owes its origin to some desperate encounter with a grizzly or bull bison in the backwoods of America, which suggested to the inventor the necessity for a hunter being armed with a quicker-firing and more automatic weapon than a double-barrel when in the pursuit of dangerous game.

CHAPTER XXXIII—AND LAST

THE last year of my long, and in a way, eventful Indian life had at length arrived. It was in the month of February, 1857, that I had first set foot on Indian soil, little thinking then that India was to be my future home. Yet, now in the year of grace 1896, I found myself still there. For close on forty years, with but few periods of leave home, my life had been spent in Bengal. Transferred periodically from one district to another, I had, in the course of my long service, practically exploited the whole of that huge province, officially known as Lower Bengal, and was now once more in the District of J——, the scene of many a past adventure.

This district was one of the few which, from their isolated situation, had so far escaped the " blessings " said to follow the process called civilization, but which, in Bengal at any rate, seems to end in discontent and a condition perilously bordering on sedition. I had been reappointed here at my own request, for as my time for leaving India was approaching, I wished to take away with me the recollection of what India had been, rather than what it was as I had seen it where I had last served—a model of the " up-to-date " district with an Europeanised Babu at its head assisted, with the sole exception of myself, by a staff of his own countrymen, most estimable in themselves but from a companionship point of view, of little use to me.

The three years I had passed there had consequently been to me a mere existence, and but for my work, which left me little time to feel the loneliness of my life, I could scarcely have endured it, for sport there was none, nor any other recreation to occupy my leisure hours, had there been any to fill up. Fortunately for me, however, the " civilizing influences " of the new *régime* had not apparently extended to the criminal population—or if they had,

only tended to increase their professional efficiency, for of the many districts I had served in, it was the most criminal of them all; and, as I have already hinted, kept me well employed.

The change, then, to a part of the Province still comparatively primeval, and where I had white men as companions, was one I had hailed with delight, and the two years I had now spent there, compared with those immediately preceding, had passed only too quickly, for I was now, as I have said, about to sever my connection, not only with this district but with India altogether.

My successor had already been appointed and was to relieve me very shortly, when one evening, a week before the date fixed for his arrival, a serious case of robbery, with murder, was reported from one of my distant outposts, requiring my immediate presence on the spot.

Truly " The policeman's lot is not a happy one " was my first reflection on receiving this information as I realized the discomforts the journey would entail; for here was I, practically on the eve of my departure, my camp kit all disposed of, and the rest of my belongings still waiting to be packed. To add to my vexation, the journey was a long one and through a dense forest which could only be negotiated on an elephant, of all riding animals the most tiring for long journeys. However, the case being such an important one, I had no option in the matter, so ordering the two police elephants to be " padded," I decided to start as soon as the moon had risen.

There was little required in the way of preparation, and a couple of hours later I was well on the way, one elephant carrying my servant, some bedding and a change, the other a light bamboo " howdah " containing myself, and my orderly seated behind me. The latter held my Winchester-repeater, all that was left of my " battery," which, with the rest of my sporting paraphernalia, had already been disposed of. I had brought this rifle with me in case it might be wanted, little thinking at the time the part it was to play in the expedition.

Meanwhile we were drawing near the forest, which we shortly entered. Here the road ended and for the next fifteen miles or so, there was nothing but a track—a narrow

TWO USEFUL MEMBERS OF THE FORCE.

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path with high jungle on each side of it, often meeting overhead. Nevertheless, it was an interesting experience, this night-journeying through the heart of that dense forest, and one I had ample opportunity of enjoying since sleep was quite out of the question, and any attempt to indulge in it must have ended in disaster. As the night advanced the forest seemed to awaken into life and the cries of various beasts were now frequently to be heard; particularly the bell-like notes of the sambhur calling to each other, and the short sharp bark of the small red deer, so curiously resembling the barking of a dog. Occasionally, too, in the far distance would be heard the shrill trumpeting of wild elephants, eliciting from their burdened brethren those curious, rumbling sounds, emitted by all elephants alike, when frightened or excited. These various cries continued at intervals, throughout the night, and finally, just as the dawn was breaking, a loud reverberating roar, as of a sudden peal of thunder, arose from the jungle close beside them.

To my long-practised ear the sound was unmistakable. It was a tiger calling to its mate. Snatching my rifle, already loaded, from my orderly, I stood up in the " howdah " and scanned the jungle carefully all round, but nothing was to be seen nor was the roar repeated. Nevertheless, from the behaviour of the elephants, as, with trunks uplifted, they sniffed the tainted air, it was evident the animal was near, probably just within the jungle, watching us or creeping stealthily along the edge. Presently, out of the gloomy depth beyond there came the tigress's reply, fainter because more distant, but none the less terrifying in its tones. She continued calling for some time, wondering doubtless at the silence of her mate, till, with the approach of daylight, she, too, became silent.

About au hour later, we had passed out of the forest and, our route now lying through scrub and patches of grass jungle, our progress was easier and more rapid. As we were going through one of these grass jungles, somewhat more extensive than others we had passed, I, being on the leading elephant, observed a slight movement in the grass, as of some animal a yard or two ahead. A small deer or perhaps a pigmy-hog, I concluded, and

as I was anxious to obtain a good specimen of the last, I fired into the moving grass, aiming well forward on the off-chance of a hit. The animal made no sound, and thinking I had missed, I was about to fire again, when the next moment, to my surprise, there was a violent commotion in the grass lasting for some seconds and then all movement ceased. The beast, whatever it might be, was evidently dead, but to make sure, the elephant was ordered to pull aside the grass, an order which, after some expostulation, it obeyed, exposing to view a patch of jet-black fur, obviously no part of deer or pigmy-hog !

Wondering then what this hairy thing could be, for only a portion of it was visible from the elephant, I got down to examine it more closely. Then, on pulling more of the grass away, I found, to my indescribable amazement and delight, that the animal I had killed was an enormous black bear ! The bullet had entered at the base of the skull causing almost instantaneous death, thus accounting for the silence of the animal on receiving the shot. From the condition of the teeth it was evident the beast was very old and possibly, too, deaf, or it would otherwise have heard the elephants approaching. The carcass measured 6 feet 7 inches from nose to tip of tail, practically a record for that part of the country, hence I had good reason to congratulate myself on this extraordinary fluke, especially as the jungle was not one likely to hold a bear ! We had some difficulty in hoisting the huge body on to the pad elephant, but with the aid of its companion and a rope finally succeeded, and continuing our interrupted journey, soon arrived at our destination.

The rest of that day was passed in examining witnesses in the case, and a mass of evidence was obtained, a tenth of which, if true, would have been sufficient to hang half the people in the village. Fortunately for them, however, most of it, on being sifted, proved to be absolutely false, and while seated smoking after I had concluded the day's work, I could not help wondering to myself whether Ananias or any of his descendants had ever visited these parts !

Next day, having completed the investigation, without arriving any nearer the truth, I was preparing to return

home, when a " chokidar," or village watchman of another village, came to the outpost with the report that a tiger of gigantic proportions had killed a bullock during the night, and was lying up in an adjoining jungle. Mindful of my late experience of these people, I questioned the man closely, and after much cross-examination came to the conclusion that his story was true except as to the size of the tiger, which had evidently been increased for the special benefit of the " sahib," and probably with a view to extra " bukshish " in proportion.

The village was some distance off, but as there was a planter's bungalow near it, belonging to a man named W——, whom I knew, where I could put up for the night, I decided to go. The journey occupied some hours, and it was nearly dark before I reached the bungalow, to find its lonely occupant seated, smoking on the verandah after his hard day's work. His delight at the sudden appearance of a white man and a friend may be easily imagined, since it was the first white face he had seen for many a long day. He too had heard of the " kill," of which he said there had been several lately, adding that although he had " sat up " for the tiger often at night, the beast had not hitherto returned to its " kills."

This was not encouraging, in that it indicated an amount of cunning on the tiger's part likely to cause trouble, hence it was resolved to try and counteract this by posting the " guns " on trees, at places where their presence was unlikely to be suspected. Early next morning accordingly, mounting the elephants, we started for the jungle, which turned out to be a very large one, but divided into two portions by a cart track leading from the factory to the village on the other side of it.

The bullock had evidently been killed while in this track, and its carcass dragged into the southern portion, where the tiger was now probably lying up. Selecting two convenient trees on the fringe of the opposite cover and about two hundred yards apart, I now posted my friend on one, and climbing on to the other, sent the elephants round with orders to beat up towards them. An hour or so later they were heard in the distance, crashing through the jungle, and presently a terrific roar, followed by two shots from the

planter's post announced that the tiger was on foot. Soon after the elephants emerged on to the track, rumbling and trumpeting with excitement, and were sent round at once to beat up the other portion, which the tiger had just entered.

This time the beast clung tenaciously to cover, giving the impression it was hit, and it was not until the beat was nearly over that it gave any indication of its presence, then, with a succession of loud hoarse coughing roars, it dashed out on to the track. Once more two shots in quick succession rung out from W——'s post, for fortune again had favoured him, but heedless of the bullets, the tiger gained the cover, then, turning sharply to its right, came crashing through the jungle, heading towards my tree, roaring loudly all the time. It passed across my front, keeping well under cover, until it had reached the edge, then broke out into the open, about eighty yards to my right, evidently making for a larger jungle, some half a mile away, but slowly and heavily as if wounded. However, though now in the open, the tiger was not an easy mark to hit, for between it and my post were several trees and bushes, making the shot almost an impossible one, but it was a case of taking it or none, and being much too keen to miss a chance, I was not to be put off.

With the butt of the Winchester pressed tightly to my shoulder I watched my opportunity, and as the patch of yellow showed for an instant in a gap between two trees I fired. When the smoke had cleared, the tiger was still going, but a moment later it seemed to stumble, then fell with a crash into a bush, where it lay struggling, evidently hard hit and trying to get up. Meanwhile the elephants had come out on to the path, so quitting our respective perches, we lost no time in mounting and hurried to the spot, prepared for a desperate struggle, for a tiger wounded and at bay is a formidable foe, even though its adversary be mounted on an elephant. However, we had not gone many yards when all movement ceased within the bush, on reaching which we found the beast stretched out at full length and dead as the proverbial door nail.

The young planter, wild with joy, this being his first tiger, was most grateful to me for having stopped it, observing, as he realized the situation, that " but for my last

THE SLAYERS AND THE SLAIN.

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shot " the beast would probably have escaped. How true was this observation he had yet to learn, and not altogether to his satisfaction! For later on, when examining the carcass, two extraordinary discoveries were made. Firstly, that the bullet which killed the tiger had hit one of the trees, then glancing at right angles, had struck the animal behind, and travelling through its body was found buried in the muscles of the neck!

Secondly, and stranger still, was the fact that this was the only bullet in the body, for, of the four fired by the young planter, not one had touched the beast! That he had missed four times seemed to him incredible, but there was no other mark upon the skin—not even a graze. On the other hand, the bullet found, when cut out, proved to be a solid one, such as he knew I was using at the time, whereas those he had fired himself were the ordinary, hollow, copper-cored express.

With such conclusive evidence against him the young sportsman was fain to accept his disappointment, but, as I now laughingly remarked, there was some consolation in the fact of having taken part in a performance probably unparalleled in the annals of tiger shooting! Nevertheless, he was much disgusted at having lost his chance of bagging his first tiger, but like all young sportsmen who had never seen one before, he had been too eager, firing far too hurriedly each time, and probably only in the direction of, rather than at the beast itself, as such novices are apt to do.

This may seem incredible, but none the less is often done, for it must be borne in mind that a tiger, seen for the first time at large in its own jungles, is a sight few sportsmen—no matter how familiar they may be with other animals as dangerous—can look on without experiencing a feeling of intense excitement, coupled with an almost uncontrollable desire to possess its head and skin.

It is this insatiable longing, then, to secure these precious trophies that makes the young sportsman nervous and prompts him either to shoot too quickly, as soon as he sights the animal, instead of waiting till it gives him an easier shot; or, on the other hand, to delay too long, and thus have to chance a longer and less easy shot. Not that my performance on this occasion had been anything to be

proud of, for of all the lucky shots I ever fired, this was assuredly the luckiest of them all—excelling, for its extraordinarily fortunate deflection, even the one with which I had bagged my bear the day before.

Taken together, however, these two extraordinary successes were probably as remarkable in their way as any ever achieved by an Indian sportsman, and a very fit ending, I thought, to my sporting career, since they were destined to be the last two shots I should ever fire out of a rifle.

The return journey proved uneventful, and three days later—my successor having arrived—I handed over charge to him, experiencing, for the first time in my life, the extraordinary sensation of being my own master, a position I found somewhat perplexing after having lived, for close on forty years, by rules and regulations, and it consequently took me some time to realize my freedom.

Within a week from the date of my emancipation, I found myself on board the P. & O. steamship *N*——, homeward bound and trying hard to believe that I was really severing my connection with India, its jungles and its beasts, for ever and for ever.

THE END

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